Unemployed Younger Baby Boom Women's Career Decision-Making Experiences: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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UNEMPLOYED YOUNGER BABY BOOM WOMEN’S CAREER DECISION-MAKING
EXPERIENCES: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
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March 7, 2016

UNEMPLOYED YOUNGER BABY BOOM WOMEN’S CAREER DECISION-MAKING EXPERIENCES: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

UNEMPLOYED YOUNGER BABY BOOM WOMEN’S CAREER DECISION-MAKING EXPERIENCES: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

By
Karen T. Ganska
May 2016

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Matthew J. Bundick

This exploratory qualitative study seeks to describe and understand the career decision-making process of unemployed American women who make up the younger cohort of the baby boom generation, namely those born between 1955 and 1964. Career decision making is a complex process involving a number of generational characteristics as well as personal and economic considerations. Unemployment further complicates this process, especially in the decade prior to receiving retirement benefits. This study uses interpretative phenomenological analysis to analyze semi-structured interviews with eight unemployed younger baby boom women to investigate how their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions affect their career decision-making experience. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (2005), Erikson’s lifespan theory (1959), and selected career development theories provide lenses through which these women’s experiences can be understood. Eight themes emerged from the data, including the following:
unemployment as a preparation period; career aspirations; digital natives; age discrimination; bioecological systems influence; generativity vs. stagnation; identity expressed in career decision making; and influence of intuition, chance, and personal factors. The findings suggest that the women used the period of unemployment to become self-aware and thoughtful about future career decision making, and enhance their computer as well as career decision making skills. Implications for theory and counseling practice as well as suggestions for future research are provided.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Eileen Lucot, who was the first to encourage my pursuit of a midlife Ph.D. I believe you were with me on this journey.

To my loving husband, Mark Ganska, who believed in me and never doubted my ability to complete any scholarly challenges. Time to start the next journey together.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my family who has been such a tremendous source of support. From Mary’s text message on the first night of class to Kevin’s encouraging visits in my home office, my children sustained my drive to complete all of the work required to graduate. My husband Mark has inspired me with his positive spirit.

I would like to thank my doctoral committee, who I respect for their scholarly insight and teaching role model. Dr. Levers and Dr. Zeleke introduced me to qualitative research. I hope to continue to develop as a qualitative researcher. A special thank you to Dr. Bundick for all of the encouragement, expertise, and steady guidance on my plethora of questions. Reading the tracked changes was like getting a gift to become a better scholarly writer, even down to such details as using the em dash.

I am deeply indebted to the women who shared their stories with me for this research. They found time between their many activities, including domestic responsibilities, education, and job search to enlighten me. They trusted me to get the story right and recognized the significance of the changing expectations of vocation in late middle age. I also want to thank the gatekeepers at the organizations who opened their doors and shared their experience.

Last of all, there are a number of family and friends who supported me emotionally and with their resources. My nieces, Katie Lucot Morris and Kelly Lucot, contributed their skills in editing and transcription to lighten my load. My younger baby boom friends reinforced my desire to understand more fully the vocational changes that are our future. I am grateful that you were willing to hear me out as I “problematized” my thoughts. Last of all, I knew I could always
count on my sister, Linda Pastorkovich, to take my phone calls and my dad, Robert Lucot, to welcome me on my way home from classes.

I posted a sign “Focus on the Journey” next to my desk when I began the dissertation. I am thankful I had so many supporters in person and in spirit to make this journey with me.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to explore the career decision-making experience of unemployed women who make up the younger cohort of the baby boom generation, namely those born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964 (Green & Pontell, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphas, Matz-Costa, & James, 2012; Stewart & Torges, 2006). The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study is to explore, describe, and understand the career decision-making experience of a sample of unemployed women from this generational cohort. This study is important because women of the generation represent a specific experience of historical, cultural, and economic factors (Alwin, McCammon & Hofer, 2006; Mannheim, 1952) that may influence the career decision-making process. Additionally, improvements in healthcare offer longer life cycles in late middle age and the potential of a new life purpose (Bateson, 2010).

The findings from this study will inform career counselors working with an aging population affected by changing demographics and social security laws within a global economy. The research employed interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore career decision making in order to comprehend and interpret the experiences and viewpoints (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006) of the younger baby boom women. Participants in this study include a purposefully selected group of eight younger baby boom women who are unemployed and making career decisions.

This chapter begins with the background, context, and statement of the problem that focuses the study. Following this is the purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study. Also included in this chapter is a summary of the theoretical frameworks, research approach, research perspectives and assumptions. The chapter concludes
with a brief description of methodology for the research, definitions of some of the key terminology used and the organization of the dissertation.

**Background of the Problem**

The average age of the population in the United States continues to increase, in large part due to the size of the generation born between 1946 and 1964, known as the baby boomers (Vincent & Velkoff, 2010). Baby boom adults over 50 years of age represent one third of the total U. S. population (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006). Within the span of the 20 year baby boom generation, sociologists identify distinctly different experiences of culture, historical events, and economic conditions based on birth year (Czaja, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphas et al., 2012). Some recent scholars argue that there is a distinct cohort within the baby boom population referred to as the *younger baby boomers* born between 1955 and 1964 (Green & Pontell, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphas et al., 2012; Stewart & Torges, 2006). Advertisers recognize the distinct attitudes and values of the second half of the generation when marketing goods and services to the *younger baby boom generation* (Green & Pontell, 2006). Baby boomers are healthier and better educated than previous generations, challenging expectations of work and leisure after the age of 50 (Bateson, 2010; Whitbourne & Willis, 2006). At the time of this writing, younger baby boomers are between 51 and 60 years old.

**Baby Boomers and Employment**

Baby boomers, accustomed to leading social change, continue to challenge the meaning of successful life and assumptions about how to spend their lifetime (Bateson, 2010). Baby boomers intend to remain in the workforce longer than their predecessors. Labor force projections to 2022 predict older workers (50-59 years old) will continue to participate in the labor force in large numbers, contributing to the aging workforce. The projected workforce
participation rate of older workers surpasses the projected workforce participation rate of younger workers 16-24 years old (Toossi, 2013). In 2022, the youngest of the baby boom generation will be 58 years old. Another demographic change is the shifting of predominant gender of the workforce (Toossi, 2013). Projected female participation is 46.8% overall compared to 53.2% projected male participation in 2022 (Toossi, 2013). In general, women are expected to be in the workforce almost as frequently as men. The shift in workforce demographics is noteworthy in the 21st century world of work.

Shifting workforce demographics are also influenced by social security policy. Revisions to social security policy require workers to delay retirement to age 67 to receive full social security eligibility in 2022 (Dohm, 2000). Increasing life expectancy, eliminating mandatory retirement, and enacting age discrimination laws are credited for the increase in the labor force participation by baby boom workers (Toossi, 2012). Younger baby boom women are anticipated to work at least another decade or more (i.e., threshold of retirement).

**Employment and the economy.** The economic recession of 2007 and later economic recovery in 2009 continues to have implications on career decision making. During the recession, workers in late middle age had a difficult time remaining employed (Pynoos & Liebig, 2009). The recession caused reduced work hours, unpaid furloughs, pay cuts, and unemployment for many older middle age workers (Zielenziger, 2009). Senior executives, mostly older middle aged, were unemployed due to shorter tenure positions and lack of corporate ladder promotion from within (Stybel & Peabody, 2007). In 2009, according to a Pew Research Poll of generational attitudes and concerns, baby boomers had the bleakest outlook on future retirement plans and became known as “Gloomy Boomers” (Morin & Fry, 2012).
The more recent administration of the Pew retirement poll confirms that in 2012, baby boomers no longer claimed first place on bleakest attitude toward future retirement plans. When the same question was asked in 2012, baby boomers decreased worry about financing retirement due in part to planning to remain employed and contributing to individual retirement accounts (Morin & Fry, 2012). The factors affecting retirement worry also include overall wealth. During the recession of 2007, younger baby boomers did experience loss in wealth but were more likely to have a combination of assets that mostly preserved wealth (Morin & Fry, 2012). Younger baby boom employees expect to increase retirement accounts by working more years rather than increasing the amount of deposits (Zick, Mayer, & Glaubitz, 2012). The complicated mix of economic conditions and social policy substantially affect the career decision-making experience.

**Context and Statement of the Problem**

Career counselors assist aging clients with career decision making in the volatile and ambiguous 21st century workplace (Duys, Ward, Maxwell, & Eaton-Comerford, 2008; Pelsma & Arnett, 2002; Pynoos & Liebig, 2009; Stybel & Peabody, 2007). Clients might be unemployed as a result of the global workforce and changing labor market. Unemployment for older workers is typically long term and especially troublesome (Rix, 2001). Pynoos and Liebig (2009) contend that long term unemployment of older workers could be due to age discrimination, lack of contemporary job skills, and transitions to new employment. Lengthy unemployment, age discrimination, out-of-date job skills, and difficulty obtaining new employment affect all older workers.
Women and Employment

Female workers have additional factors that affect career decision making. In addition to those named previously, women are more likely to be unemployed due to personal factors such as being the primary caretaker for the family and domestic responsibilities (Duberley, Carmichael, & Szmigin, 2014). According to a longitudinal survey of male and female younger baby boomers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, July), female workers held more jobs during the same time period than male workers of the same age, and the jobs were for a shorter duration. Younger baby boom women spend fewer weeks in the labor force than younger baby boom men, and the jobs tend to last 5 years or less (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, July). In essence, women’s careers are more likely to have sporadic unemployment, changes in employers, and periods of family and domestic responsibilities that create intermittent periods of work (Duberley et al., 2014). The intermittent work history of younger baby boom women impacts retirement savings and career decision making.

Statement of the Problem

Unemployment involves rethinking career choice and life direction (Austin & Cilliers, 2011). As previously described, late middle age workers face extended periods of unemployment (Rix, 2001) possibly due to age discrimination, obsolete technology skills, and changing needs of the current labor market (Pynoos & Liebig, 2009). Older workers fear that they will remain unemployed and the impact of that period of unemployment. They may also question how they will return to the job market and in what function.

Career counseling focuses on the comprehensive and complex decision-making process (Chang & McLeod, 2014). Career counselors who assist unemployed younger baby boom women must be cognizant of the full range of issues that surface during career counseling. The
client seeks career counseling in order to end the period of unemployment and return to the job market. Navigating the career decision-making process is part of the success for the unemployed younger baby boom women. Career decision-making research is on the cusp of recognizing major changes in the future of career development. Developmental theories consider the period immediately before retirement as a period of decline and deceleration (Chang & McLeod, 2014; Super, 1957). This view is examined by researchers in career and adult development who recognize the challenges inherent to providing counseling in the social, cultural, and technological context of dynamic change (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Bateson, 2010; Ronzi, 2012; Vandewater & Stewart, 2006).

While career development research has focused more on the cognitive aspects of career decision making (Amundson, Borgen, Iaquinta, Butterfield, & Koert, 2010; Ganske & Ashby, 2007; Lent & Brown, 1996), an important aspect of the research that is missing is the more holistic career decision-making experience of unemployed women during the decade prior to retirement. Researchers who have focused on women confirm the expanded years available for women to pursue other possibilities, namely opportunities to do something that completes previous goals or begin something new (Bateson, 2010). The question that has not been explored is the career decision-making experience of women who are more concerned with the need to work longer in their lifetime in order to fund retirement (Riffkin, 2014). Another emerging problem is the increasing need to work well past the traditional age of retirement, which will increase to age 67 for full social security eligibility for individuals in 2022 (Dohm, 2000). Career decision-making research has not addressed the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions associated with the changing expectations of future economic conditions.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study is to explore, describe, and understand the career decision-making experience of unemployed women born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964. The women born between these dates represent the generation known as younger baby boom (Green & Pontell, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphas et al., 2012; Stewart & Torges, 2006) with a specific experience of historical, cultural, and economic factors (Alwin et al., 2006; Mannheim, 1952) that may influence the career decision-making process. At this stage, the career decision-making experience is generally defined as identifying career alternatives that will satisfy an individual’s characteristics and broad life circumstances.

Research Questions

A thorough review of the literature related to the career decision-making process of unemployed younger baby boom women revealed a paucity of research on this topic with this particular population. Thus, the central research question that guides this study is: How do the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of unemployed younger baby boom women affect their career decision-making experience? The following subsidiary questions assist further delving into the subject of the central research question:

1. How do the bioecological spheres of human development affect the career decision-making experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women?
2. How does the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood affect the career decision-making experience of younger baby boom women?
3. How does womanhood affect the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women?
4. What criteria do unemployed younger baby boom women use to evaluate or define vocational alternatives?

Significance of the Study

The proposed study addresses a gap in the research on unemployed women and career decisions (Department of Labor, 2011; Onyx & Benton, 1996; Sok, 2010). The subject of career decision making and unemployed women in the decade prior to retirement eligibility has received little attention in the literature. Understanding women born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964 who are also unemployed is essential in the context of two events of historical, economic, and social significance. First, by 2022, the number of working women will be almost equal to the number of working men (Toossi, 2013). This coincides with the second event: a revision of social security policy requiring workers to delay retirement to age 67 to receive full social security eligibility in 2022 (Dohm, 2000). Increasing life expectancy, eliminating mandatory retirement, and enacting age discrimination laws are credited for the increase in the length of time younger baby boomers expect to participate in the labor force (Toossi, 2012).

Career decision-making research has not focused on the historical factors that potentially complicate decisions facing unemployed younger baby boom women (Duberly, Carmichael, & Szimigin, 2014; Onyx & Benton, 1996; Sok, 2010). Career decision-making research confirms cognitive and relational factors within the individual’s consideration (Amundson, 1995; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Ganske & Ashby, 2007; Motulsky, 2010). A growing body of work in career decision-making research explores the importance of the relational paradigm, especially for women and the influence of work-life balance, mothering, and midlife women’s career transition (Motulsky, 2010). Even with increasing attention on narrative and constructivist career models,
“more research is needed that includes additional populations across the lifespan, attends more specifically to gender and culture, and examines various domains within career counseling” (Motulsky, 2010, p. 1079). The present inquiry employs the interpretative phenomenological approach to extend career decision-making research based on the subjective experience of unemployed baby boom women.

The vast majority of career decision-making research has been conducted with later adolescents and young adults, in particular high school and college students (e.g., Andrews, Bullock-Yowell, Dahlen, & Nicholson, 2014; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Ganske & Ashby, 2007; Wee, 2014) Career decision-making research with non-student adults has thus far focused predominately on younger segments of middle age population, both employed and unemployed (e.g., Amundson et al., 2010; Athanasou, 2003; Bullock-Yowell, Andrews, McConnell, & Campbell, 2012). Previous generational research has identified psychological characteristics and socioeconomic circumstances of middle age baby boom adults (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006), but as yet scholars have not explored to what extent knowledge of these generational influences generalize to unemployed women’s career decision making during the middle age period of the lifespan. It is essential for researchers to explore careers and retirement “by greater interchange between traditional career theorists and those taking a more sociological perspective to understand the position of particular groups in the labor market” (Duberley et al., 2014).

Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model provides researchers a dynamic human development model where person-context actively produces characteristics as well as a final product.

The present research is thus well-suited to expand the understanding of career decision-making process by unemployed younger baby boom women. The practical application of the
findings sheds light on the contemporary issue of an aging workforce that challenges stereotypes of career after the age of 60. The findings are relevant to career counselors, employers, and policy makers who have the potential to view and provide counsel to this important population in a new way.

**Theoretical Framework for the Study**

The overarching theoretical framework for this study is phenomenological oriented. Counselors utilize interpersonal skills to understand developmental problems from the point of view of the involved person. Finlay (2011) asserts that therapist interpersonal skills focus on understanding the lifeworld of the client. Phenomenologists strive for “engagement with, and a faithful commitment to, describing experience in all its richness and layers” (Finlay, 2011, p. 15). The participants’ narratives provide the details but the researcher is compelled to focus on the experience and not the basic data of the participants’ account (Finlay, 2011). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) assert that phenomenological philosophy provides psychologists an abundance of viewpoints to study and understand lived experience.

**Phenomenological Orientation**

The theoretical framework of this study is consistent with a phenomenological orientation. Researchers who are not philosophers “reflect in a phenomenological manner on the living meanings of everyday experiences, phenomena, and events” (van Manen, 2014, p. 22). Furthermore, phenomenological research seeks to explore what an experience is like for a person (van Manen, 1990). The individual conveys the experience to the researcher as lived through, a conscious expression of the experience as it exists (van Manen, 1990). The participants’ narratives provide the details, but the researcher is compelled to focus on the experience and not the basic data of the participants’ account (Finlay, 2011). The researcher who “wonders”
performs phenomenology and the search for meaning (van Manen, 2014). The phenomenological theoretical orientation of this study is preceded by a research approach, research perspectives and assumptions.

**Research approach.** Researchers who seek to understand a concept or an experience rely on qualitative approaches to explore the gap between existing knowledge and the potential to learn more about that phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). For example, Amundson et al. (2010) used a phenomenological research method to understand the experience of career decision making of employed adults. The study addressed the meaning of the subjective experience unique to the interplay of economic, historical, and social events within the relational context of career decision making (Amundson et al., 2010). In a similar research approach, the current research seeks to understand the experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women in order to locate the career decisions within a generational context. The qualitative, phenomenological philosophical perspective postpones all judgments until the consciousness of the experience is more intentional (Creswell, 2013). Knowing is completed through questioning a subject about what an experience is like. The researcher questions what the experience is like for each individual in order to understand the essence (Creswell, 2013).

**Research perspectives and assumptions.** Epistemology is the “set of beliefs about how it is that we know what we know” (Luker, 2008, p. 10). The proposed research assumes that the reality of each woman is socially constructed. This means that each woman “constructs the perception of world, that no one perception is ‘right’ or more ‘real’ than another” (Glesne, 2006, p. 7) The women will be interviewed in order to convey that knowledge of self to the investigator. Bertau (2008) describes psychological research of identity construction and the process of change. The person has the ability to construe multiple versions of the self as there is
“development of new and different positions in the self” (p. 96). Belenky et al. (1986) eloquently describe the social constructionist give and take through conversation. Language must pass back and forth between listening and speaking in order to “represent their experiences” and by doing so people are less isolated from the self (p. 26). An interpretive approach of analysis allows the individual to uncover layers of meaning (Berg, 2007). Qualitative research reveals the experience of the individual and provides a path to understanding women’s career development (Stead et al., 2012). Phenomenological research is well suited to understanding individual experience within the context of a particular social setting. The researcher collects data from the individual who is willing to share their perception of reality and meaning of that experience (Berg, 2007).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The specific version of phenomenology used for this study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA differs from other approaches as a result of three theoretical underpinnings within IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology was described previously. Hermeneutics is synonymous with interpretation used in the title of IPA which refers to the iterative process of analysis of the texts (Smith et al., 2009). The hermeneutic circle describes a number of ways to view the relationship of the meanings in the text. The IPA researcher assumes both an “insider” and “outsider” interpretative stance with the text. The interpretative stance is meant to elucidate the meaning of experience.

Smith et al. (2009) specifically defines the role of the researcher as an “interpretative analyst” who “offers a perspective on the text which the author is not” able to articulate (p. 23). The analyst conveys meaning of the experience by interpretation and “making sense” of the
phenomenon (p. 28). Hermeneutics is not meant to interpret in a psychoanalytic manner (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 36-37).

Idiography describes the focus of the exploration of the particular. Two aspects of idiography affect the final analysis of participant accounts of experience. First, the amount of and attention to detail is very explicit. To accomplish this amount of thoroughness, the analysis is systematic. The second aspect of idiography is the understanding of experiential phenomena that involves a certain group of people in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009). This study involves a particular group, unemployed younger baby boom women, and a particular experience, career decision making.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The multiple theoretical foundations of IPA suit the research purpose of this study. It is appropriate to initially represent the original career decision-making experience of each woman, followed by incorporating their references to metaphors and unique descriptions of experience. Those references and descriptions provide the text that describes the structure of the human lifeworld. The initial hermeneutic reflection is guided by the lifeworld existentials (van Manen, 1990, 2014). Another layer of analysis integrates theoretical ideas that underpin the alternative interpretations of the text (Finlay, 2011, p. 141). For example, bioecological perspectives on human development provide a hierarchy of systems used as the theory to underpin interpretation of the text (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Finlay (2011) reminds researchers to follow the lead of the data instead of using a favored theory to force an interpretation of the text. The researcher must be mindful of introducing his or her own slant on the interpretation, even to the extent of selecting a theoretical perspective for understanding the text.
IPA is not a prescriptive approach (Smith et al., 2009; Finlay, 2011). Additionally, IPA attends to a particular context of an experience for a particular group of people to understand personal meaning of the experience and sense-making. The research questions seek to explore personal views and perceptions of unemployment and career decision making at a certain moment in time (Smith et al., 2009). After formulating the research question and the subsidiary questions, IPA qualifies as a suitable qualitative research methodology.

**Definitions of Terms**

Baby boomers: A term referring to generational age for people born between 1946 and 1964. The generational designation is a label that indicates a common experience of time and place since generational labels are not applied globally (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006).

Career: A series of “occupations in the life of an individual” (Super, 1957). Super emphasized psychosocial development, societal expectations, and occupational opportunities.

Career decision making: Identifying career alternatives that will satisfy an individual’s characteristics and circumstances.

Cohort: A synonym with the term generation to represent a group of people born about the same time who experience the same historical events (Alwin et al., 2006). Mannheim (1952) identifies cohorts based on similar historical and social experiences. The term used by Mannheim is generational units. The younger baby boomers are a generational unit.

Middle adulthood: The life stage occurring between 34 to 60 years of age; later adulthood encompasses 60 to 75 years of age (Erikson, 1959). This study uses late middle adulthood to represent the time after age 50 but before later adulthood, roughly 60 years old.

the criteria meet the conditions of a recession (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, February). Other names used by scholars include *global economic crisis* and *financial meltdown*.

Threshold of retirement: The antecedent to retirement; the period of time prior to retirement typically when the process of retirement is considered including the problems that may arise before and after retiring, and how the life situation will be altered. The life situation includes the process of leaving work as well as the related changes in health, finances, and living arrangement (Sherman, 1974).

Younger baby boomers: The term “younger baby boomers” refers to those born between 1955 and 1964, and is accepted and used by the Sloan Center on Aging and Work (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2012). Whitbourne and Willis (2006) note it is necessary to differentiate between the two groups of baby boomers that comprise midlife adults; the leading-edge boomers were born in the first half of the 18 year period between 1946 and 1964 and trailing-edge boomers were born in the later half. For the purpose of consistency, the term “younger baby boomers” will be used for the trailing-edge cohort.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 introduces the background of the study, the context and statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, and limitations. The chapter includes a brief overview of the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertaining to the study of the baby boom generation, the significant characteristics of females members of the younger baby boom generation, as well as historical events impacting female younger baby boom women. The literature review continues with a discussion of multiple models of human development, career counseling, and related research of the recent decade. The chapter concludes with a theoretical grounding for the study.
Chapter 3 presents the detailed discussion of the essential steps required to select the research design. The chapter also includes specifics of the data collection, participant selection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and finally the standards of validation and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 provides the results of the data collection. Chapter 5 discusses the findings from the interviews with reference to the theoretical frameworks. The chapter presents the themes and suggests avenues for further study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter two reviews the literature and research important to understanding the context and prior research related to the current inquiry. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to explore, describe, and understand the career decision-making experience of unemployed women born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964. The women born between these dates represent the generation known as younger baby boom (Green & Pontell, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphas et al., 2012; Stewart & Torges, 2006) with a specific experience of historical, cultural, and economic factors (Alwin et al., 2006; Mannheim, 1952) that may influence the career decision-making process. Empirical, theoretical, and conceptual literature is cited as well as literature focused on recent economic conditions and labor force predictions, including the period of time up to August 2015. The latter time frame coincides with the qualitative interviews and collection of the research data. The literature review summarizes key foci of the present inquiry.

The review begins with a summary of the major works that constitute the key empirical, theoretical, and conceptual writing on the baby boom generation. The baby boom generation is considered in the context of this review in three ways: the baby boom, the younger baby boom, and finally younger baby boom women. The present inquiry deals with a specific labor market and economy. The literature review focuses on the significant economic and labor market conditions. The subsequent portion of the review summarizes the conceptual literature on human development, feminine epistemology, and career decision making. The review then continues to summarize the major empirical, theoretical, and conceptual findings on women and career choices in general and during middle age.

Based on the researchers’ understanding of the literature, interpretative phenomenological analysis addresses the exploratory nature of the research questions. The
chapter concludes with relevant literature supporting the inquiry’s conceptual framework. Finally, the chapter summarizes the implications from the literature review of the significance of exploring career decision making of younger baby boom women who are unemployed.

**Baby Boom Generation**

Social scientists in the fields of political science, economics, sociology, and researchers in organizational behavior and human resources provide much of the information on adults born between 1946 and 1964 known as baby boomers (Fishman, 2010; Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2012; Whitbourne & Willis, 2006). The generation of baby boomers is now 51 years old or older. The baby boom generation is noteworthy due to the size of the cohort, the impact on socioeconomic policy, and the impact on cultural norms (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). While there is much debate about how the baby boom generation became so large, researchers agree on the criteria used to describe a generation. Alwin et al. (2006) define generation as a shared social history that is recognized by those who are in the generation and those who study the generation. Baby boomers crowded hospitals at birth, crowded schools from childhood through adulthood, caused labor markets to swell, and face potential dwindling public resources for aging adults (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). The shared experience of history, social policy, economics, and cultural norms has influenced the psychology of members of the baby boom generation (Stewart & Torges, 2006).

**Shared Historical, Socioeconomic, and Cultural Experience**

Gravett and Throckmorton (2007) explain that the typical baby boomer profile credits large families, the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, and political mistakes (e.g., Nixon and Clinton) for personal characteristics. Economic growth was the norm when baby boom children grew up and began to work (Stewart & Torges, 2006). Eggebeen and Sturgeon
(2006) report higher completion rates of education than any previous cohort. While there are some educational differences based on demographics (e.g., age, race, gender), the fact that the generation is more highly educated has contributed to the psyche of the baby boomers (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). Light (1988) points to five shared experiences that unite all baby boomers: (a) the campaign for more liberal social values, (b) parents who believed in great expectations for the future, (c) increased social awareness and knowledge of major historical events due to widespread television access, (d) competition for public resources due to social crowding, and (e) fears associated with global threat of cold-war weapons. Stewart and Torges (2006) suggest that there is debate about whether previous social or historical experiences are consequential for later life stages. They do acknowledge that “certain experiences are formative and remain lifelong reference points when subsequent events occur” (Stewart & Torges, 2006, p. 26). The social policy, economics, cultural, and historical experiences influenced personality characteristics attributed to the baby boom generation.

**Characteristics of Baby Boomers**

Generations who experience social and historical events form a generational identity (Mannheim, 1952; Whitbourne & Willis, 2006). Baby boom children grew up during a period of peace and economic expansion (Stewart & Torges, 2006). These expectations translated into characteristics of optimism, confidence, and sense of entitlement (Coontz, 1997). Adolescents grew up during tumultuous social change and polarizing war (Stewart & Torges, 2006). Adolescent generational identity became more anxious and questioning of social and cultural norms in contrast to the earlier childhood generational identity of optimism, confidence, and entitlement. The adult generational identity reflects more conservative politics and focus on normative developmental tasks related to personal relationships (Stewart & Torges, 2006).
Overall, Stewart and Torges (2006) maintain that core values and personal identities remained stable from childhood through middle age adulthood. For example, the adult baby boom generation supports inclusion of women and minorities in equal rights, but the activism does not resemble the atmosphere of the 1960’s. Equal rights in employment manifested this collective attitude.

The adult generation of baby boom employees went to work and exhibited their collective generation identity. Managers who seek to blend workers from various generations learn that the baby boom employee is typically well-educated as well as competitive for attention, rewards, and recognition (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007). Those same managers also describe baby boom employees as greedy, ambitious, and materialistic. Parents of baby boomers encouraged their children to work hard since life would be better for them if they worked hard. Baby boomers believe in personal freedom and upward social mobility for those who work hard and have the ability to do the work (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007).

**Generational Units**

The preceding narrative highlighted a brief view of the baby boom generation and the related historical and social events that created generational identity. Sociologists generally agree that such shared experience of time and place represents a variable much like social class (Mannheim, 1952). Key to formation of the generational identity and characteristics is the timing of the experiences for the individuals in the generation. Mannheim (1952) advocates a further division of generational units based on the shared historical problems that create a group within a generation. Key to understanding generational units is the more cohesive reaction, “a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 306). Alwin et al. (2006) add that the shared experience of history and
social events makes an impact “particularly during formative years” (p. 48). Within the baby boom generation, generational units can be identified to form specific cohorts based on the experience of time and place.

**Younger Baby Boomers**

Due to the large stretch of time from the start of the baby boom birth year (1946) to the end of the baby boom generation (1964), historical events and social experiences are experienced differently by the generational unit (Green & Pontell, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphas et al., 2012; Stewart & Torges, 2006;). One example is the Vietnam War. Some older baby boomers experienced the war as soldiers, but younger baby boomers experienced the war as observers through television or as siblings to the soldiers. Alwin et al. (2006) similarly warn researchers to consider historical and social experiences to sort cohorts within the baby boom generation. The baby boom generation is not one massive, homogeneous group. Alwin (1998) preferred to conduct research using two cohorts within the baby boom generation based on birth year: 1947 to 1954 and 1955 to 1962. The present inquiry utilizes birth years between 1955 and 1964. The ending year (e.g. 1964) is consistent with convention (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). The focus of attention for this inquiry is younger baby boomers 51 to 61 years of age.

**Comparing younger baby boomers to older baby boomers.** Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006) separated the baby boom generation into three cohorts for their purposes: comparing the cohorts each at the age of 40 years and comparing the oldest, middle, and youngest cohorts. Demographic differences were tracked using data drawn from the 1989, 1995, and 2002 Current Population Surveys (CPS). By using the Annual Demographic File at the three selected time periods, the profile represents the period of time when each cohort entered middle age at age 40. The trends analyzed by Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006) provide information about aging after 40
years of age and what the future may hold for those who turn 50 based on the oldest of the baby boom generation. Eggebeen and Sturgeon’s (2006) sample includes racial and ethnic demographic information which is reported here as well. The usefulness of the information will be determined when analyzing the themes that arise during the interviews. The present inquiry does not seek to differentiate race as a selection criteria, but the research participant may contemplate the role race plays in career decision making. Demographic information differs on three key areas that are of interest to this inquiry: living arrangements, education, and economic resources.

**Younger baby boomers and living arrangements.** Compared to earlier cohorts, the younger baby boomers entering middle age (40 years old) marry less frequently than the older baby boomers (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). More specifically, racial/ethnic groups marry at different rates as well. Fewer Black and Hispanic younger baby boomers marry prior to age 40 than White younger baby boomers (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). Race plays a factor in the household size which may be reflected in the themes of the interviews. Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006) observe that the rate of cohabitation at age 40 is low for all groups including race/ethnic grouping. The sexual revolution did not translate into higher rates of long term cohabitation.

At the time of the study by Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006), the older baby boomers would have been the age of interest for this research. Within this cohort, women at age 40 were less likely to be living alone, but once they turned age 50 and older, living alone increased noticeably (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). Using those data to predict the living arrangements of the younger female baby boomers when they are over 50 years old (the population for this research), translates to more single women over 50 living alone than men of the same age. Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006) explain that men tend to remarry. There is also evidence that
baby boomers are likely to have children or aging relatives in the household after age 50, but the number of households with children or aging relatives is balanced by the number of households that experience the departure of grown children from the household (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006).

Younger baby boomers, education, and economic resources. Younger baby boomers participated in higher education at higher rates than previous cohorts (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). Differences do exist by race/ethnicity; Black and Hispanic younger baby boomers participate in higher education at lower rates than Whites. The overall effect is that while some younger baby boomers have the education to compete in the current labor force, many do not have the type of education needed for well-paying jobs. A summary of the data on education concludes that “substantial factions of baby boomers have low or modest incomes” (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006, p. 19).

Income distributions both confirm and refute the expectations of affluence which were present in early adulthood. Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006) analyze the CPS income data that has been adjusted to allow for comparison across years. White baby boomers earn more than Black or Hispanic middle age workers. Even though there are gains in income between age 40 and beyond 50 years of age, Whites earn more than Black or Hispanic workers over 50 years of age. Dual income couples earn more (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). If the couple remains married and both have incomes, the socioeconomic status may meet the expectations for affluence that were instilled during the earlier formative years.

Younger baby boomers, economics, and social policy. While younger baby boomers may have the same ambition for affluence as the older baby boomers, their position in the history of the labor market meant that some of the best jobs were available to the older portion of the
baby boom generation but not available for the younger baby boomers (Cappelli, 2005). Thus cohort size creates a socioeconomic disadvantage that affects competition for jobs and stresses the opportunity structure (Easterlin, 1987). The overabundance of human resources increased competition and drove wages to remain low as supply outpaced demand (Cappelli, 2005). Younger baby boomers experienced a stalled career and decreased lifetime earning potential due to lack of management positions available for advancement (Hall & Richter, 1990). The global expansion of the world market for human resources also contributed to employers changing their attitude toward employees (Greenhaus, 2002). Younger baby boomers, due to their place in history and the labor market, found less work in management or better paying sectors of the job market (Callanan & Greenhouse, 2008). The research question attempts to tease out whether the cohort of younger baby boomers makes career decisions that reflect the events of their earlier formative years.

Furthermore, the baby boom generation was willing to incur large amounts of debt to enjoy their prosperity (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007). Baby boomers need to work for a good salary to continue to pay for the debts created by their aspirations. At age 50 and beyond, the baby boomers are responsible for children who graduated from higher education with large school debts and elderly parents who may need social services that are expensive (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006; Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007; Parker & Patten, 2013). Many of the baby boomers rely on employment for benefits packages that provide a chance to continue to be healthy when they retire (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007). Financial and housing markets add to their financial burden even though complete collapse of those markets was avoided (Fishman, 2010). Younger baby boomers that are employed have the additional time to catch up on savings during late middle age. Unemployed younger baby boomers are more burdened by those same
issues. Butrica and Karamcheva (2012) warn that a number of unemployed adults aged 51 to 61 are vulnerable as a result of lower savings, Social Security benefits, and pensions. The 51 to 61 year old group is the first to experience the economic vulnerability that necessitates delayed retirement. These economic issues are a concern for unemployed younger baby boomers and worthy of exploration by researchers who seek to understand the relationship of historical events on career decision making.

Social security law revisions and the Great Recession of 2007 have created the need for longer work histories (Hicks & Kingson, 2009). Younger baby boomers are the first generational group nearing retirement to be affected by the lingering effects of the Great Recession (Hicks & Kingson, 2009). Dohm (2000) suggests changes to Social Security law and the shift to defined contribution retirement plans created a need for individual workers to extend the period of time in the workforce. The Social Security revisions affect those who wish to receive full benefits. In 2022, the retirement age will edge up from age 65 to age 67 (Dohm, 2000). The changing retirement system has shifted more risk to individuals and is especially problematic for older women (Hicks & Kingson, 2009). Unemployed individuals apply for Social Security benefits, even if the benefit is reduced, due to the immediate need for income (Aversa & Rugaber, 2009; Marmora & Ritter, 2014). Specifically, the unemployed workers who also had low income leave the workforce to begin Social Security benefits as close to eligibility as possible (Mamora & Ritter, 2014). Lacking income, workers decided to leave the labor market and collect retirement as soon as they are eligible.

DeVaney (1995) studied older and younger baby boomers to investigate variables affecting retirement preparation. Using age stratification, the research provided evidence that the older baby boom households were more likely to prepare for retirement than the younger baby
boom households. The results could also be interpreted as life cycle effects since education, pension coverage, and health appeared as factors to predict the retirement preparation. DeVaney (1995) found that consistent with previous literature, the younger baby boom cohort is more diverse, and the households that are non-white are less likely to be financially prepared for retirement. Educational attainment and home ownership increased the likelihood for meeting the guidelines for retirement preparation. The younger baby boom cohort could get closer to the retirement preparation level of the older baby boom cohort by increasing education and increasing the possibility of taking a more professional or managerial occupation. DeVaney (1995) cautions that upward career mobility is restricted by “crowding of the older cohort” within education settings and professional/managerial positions (p. 31). Unemployed younger baby boom women may have limitations on career choices due to the urgency to have some income, even if it impinges on the amount of benefits over the lifetime of the individual. The exploratory interviews of the unemployed female young baby boomer will seek evidence for this possibility.

**Female Younger Baby Boomers**

The present inquiry seeks to narrow the population of interest to the female younger baby boomers. Research has provided additional information about being female and a younger baby boomer. Living arrangements are a possible source of economic strain for women over 50 year of age. More women than men over age 50 in the baby boom generation live alone (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). Women over 50 years who live with children or have an elderly relative in the home experience more stress, which could be psychological or economic (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). Caputo (2002) explains that adult daughters typically fulfill the filial responsibility of caring for elders and uphold the caretaker cultural norm. The living arrangements of female
younger baby boomers that are over 51 years old are important to the present inquiry due to the socioeconomic implications of unemployment and supporting a number of people in the household.

Baby boomers expected affluence in exchange for hard work (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007). Female baby boom workers may have more difficulty reaching that goal. Women’s earnings have lagged behind men since 1981 (Hegewisch & Williams, 2013). Social and economic policy efforts at the federal level that have attempted to address the wage gap have not improved the situation, either. Since 2001, the wage gap has not changed. To make up the difference in wages, women would need to work a substantial number of years more than men (Hegewisch & Williams, 2013). This information is noteworthy because the amount of wages earned by women is often necessary to meet the basic needs of the family and is not providing luxury items (Hegewisch & Williams, 2013). Younger baby boom women tend to earn less than males and need to remain in the labor force longer to make up the difference in earnings.

Younger baby boom women may be well equipped emotionally to manage economic stress. Twenge (2000) found that children born in the 1950’s had less stress than children born in the 1980’s. This study suggests that birth cohort has an important consequence on personality development, especially during childhood. The research participant’s ability to handle the stress related to unemployment and economic conditions may stem from earlier formative experiences during childhood. The early history of younger baby boom women may reflect the observation made by Stewart and Torges (2006) suggesting previous formative experiences influence subsequent life stages.

Women of the baby boom generation, influenced by the women’s movement, exhibit a level of confidence that has developed over the lifespan (Stewart & Torges, 2006). Stewart and
Ostrove (1998) found that the generation of baby boom women developed confidence over the lifespan that is comparable to the level of confidence developed at a much earlier age by subsequent generations of women. The personality characteristics of the baby boom women hold constant during adulthood except for the personality trait known as neuroticism (Stewart & Ostrove, 1998), which is related to hostility, depression, and anxiety (Costa & McCrea, 1985). Neuroticism on average declines for women during middle age (Stewart & Ostrove, 1998).

Doherty and Baldwin (1985) utilized longitudinal data to investigate social forces and differences in locus of control of women and men during the 1960s and 1970s. Females became more aware of an external locus of control compared to males. The researchers attribute the increase to the women’s movement and cultural-shift of expectations during the decade. The sample of younger baby boom women would have been exposed to the same social influences including the women’s movement. The baby boom cohort has been used in previous research to successfully distinguish characteristics based on previous formative experiences.

**Female younger baby boomers and labor force participation.** The contemporary labor force is older, more racially and ethnically diverse, and composed of more women than previous generations (Toossi, 2012). The overall projected growth of the labor force is 0.5% during the period of 2010-2020 (Toossi, 2013). Toossi (2013) explains factors that continue to affect the growth of labor force participation. The combined formula of high labor force participation in aging adults and lower participation rates of the younger generations has a net positive effect. But the rate of 0.5% is still much lower relative to growth since 2000. The largest period of reduced labor participation was during the recession of 2007-2009 (Toossi, 2012). The labor force projections are calculated by multiplying the civilian noninstitutional population projections by the labor force projections. The slower growth of the aggregate labor
force is a result of changes in both the labor force participation rate and changes in the age, gender, racial, and ethnic composition of the population (Toossi, 2012). For the present inquiry, the labor force projections of the female younger baby boom generation is noteworthy.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics foresees growing participation of older workers during the next 10 years (Toossi, 2013). As of the writing of this manuscript, the December 2013 report is the timeliest version to understand the labor force participation expectations by age and sex. Assuming economic improvement persists, economic forecasts project full employment by 2022. Unemployed workers in 2022 will be those who are between jobs for a nominal period of time. The aging workforce spurs growth in the healthcare and insurance industries. The construction industry is also predicted to grow as older structures are replaced and current structures are renovated to suit the needs of the aging population. That growth offsets the lack of growth in other sectors of the economy (Toossi, 2013).

Economic growth is another factor in understanding the career decision-making process of the younger baby boom women. By 2022, unemployment will decline to more normal figures represented by those who are transitioning to new jobs (Toossi, 2013). Economic growth has been steady but sluggish (Woodward, 2013). To drive economic growth, government stimulus programs and the Federal Reserve System respond carefully to encourage recovery. The economic recovery following the recession of 2007 is “less robust” than expected after a period of recession (Woodward, 2013). The Bureau of Labor Statistics describes the sluggish rate of economic expansion as the “new normal” (Woodward, 2013).

At the time of the data collection in August 2015, unemployment for women between 50 and 59 years of age reduced closer to a figure that resembles frictional unemployment. Frictional unemployment is always present due to the usual labor market turnover. Workers seek better-
paying jobs and decide to remain unemployed instead of taking the first available job. Frictional unemployment represents the number of unemployed workers seeking the best match for their skills. The Current Population Survey provides labor force statistics for the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). The data reported in August 2015 records the unemployment rate of women between 50 and 54 as 4.0% and the unemployment rate of women between 55 and 59 as 4.2%. Those unemployment rates of 2015 are substantially lower than those reported by Sok (2010). The unemployment rate of workers over age 55 had increased to 7.2% in 2009.

Projections for the younger baby boomers are based on a pattern of behavior that is normal for a cohort. Formulating predictions for future labor force participation of the younger baby boom women speculates about the possibility of changing that labor force participation behavior based on historical, economic, and social policy conditions. Toossi (2012) identifies a number of reasons that older workers may increase their labor force participation: increasing life expectancy, healthier people capable of working longer portions of the lifespan, elimination of mandatory retirement, and enactment of age discrimination laws. Economic conditions may also spur the upward growth of over 55 year old labor force participation due to continued economic uncertainty, the impact of the financial crisis on individuals’ retirement savings, and investment accounts. The future of healthcare also is uncertain, specifically regarding cost of healthcare and ability to attain healthcare benefits. Finally, Social Security law revisions increased the normal retirement age for certain birth cohorts. Early retirement threatens the potential accumulation of retirement income which results in retaining workers in the labor force (Toossi, 2012). A number of the identified factors apply to all workers in the younger baby boom cohort but female younger baby boomers have additional factors that apply to employment.
Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006) found women are typically less attached to their jobs than men. In their study, women age 50 to 53 were more likely to be working part time hours compared to men of the same age. At the same time, when Eggebeen and Sturgeon (2006) compare fulltime working rates between older and younger baby boom women at the same age, the younger baby boom women are working full time at higher rates than the previous cohort of women. This information is consistent with the projections of Bureau of Labor Statistics (Toossi, 2012). This trend may be reflected in the themes of the interviews with the research participants.

**Summary of female younger baby boomers and economic conditions.** There is a corpus of literature to support the study of younger baby boom adults as a separate generational unit. The unique characteristics of the younger baby boom adult are affected by gender as well. In general, the younger baby boom female believes that hard work contributes to economic security, believes in education as a means to economic security, and believes caregiving for elder family members or younger family members is part of her responsibilities. The current sluggish economy eventually does offer chances for employment, but less rapidly compared to earlier experiences of the younger baby boom adult. Females in general have lower wages and fewer assets saved in retirement accounts. Seeking employment is not optional, but rather a necessity.

**Job Market of the 21st Century**

Career counselors know that the contemporary labor force must be equipped with job skills and personal characteristics to succeed in the 21st century workplace (Pelsma & Arnett, 2002). According to the BLS projections as highlighted in the winter 2011-2012 issue of Occupational Outlook Quarterly, service producing industries are projected to account for the most job growth between 2010 and 2020. The fastest growing industries are related to
healthcare. Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) industries make up three of the
top ten growth industries projections for 2010-2020. Workers will need education, those who
have vocational education or post-secondary education have greater opportunities for
employment than workers with less than a high school diploma (Department of Labor, BLS,
Contemporary careers consist of a series of employers rather than a linear path of lifelong
employment. Pelsma and Arnett (2002) state that career service providers help the client to plan
for the future job market and adjust career and life goals to maintain balance and job security.

In addition to job skills, a successful client has a number of personal characteristics.
Pelsma and Arnett (2002) name resilience, curiosity, persistence, and a strong work ethic as
positive personal qualities for job success. They also designate creativity and curiosity as
essential elements to face situations with an innovative spirit and challenge. Zunker (1998)
labeled this type of worker as a personal agency person. Rather than recoiling from the changes
of the future workplace, the person is energized and responds by dismissing obsolete attitudes
about work, and realizes that the future is continuously evolving. Pelsma and Arnett (2002)
recognize a need for every individual to have job skills as well as personal characteristics for
future success in the 21st century workplace. Unemployed baby boom women who possess job
skills and personal agency are better equipped to address the needs of the 21st century
workplace. Duys et al. (2008) characterizes the 21st century workplace as “volatile.”

The Recession of 2007 and Employment

The National Bureau of Economic Research officially recognized the beginning of the
Great Recession of 2007 in December 2007 and the ending in June 2009 (Bureau of Labor
Statistics, 2012). The consequences for workers included reduced work hours, unpaid furloughs

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or pay cuts, and layoffs to a number of middle age workers (Zielenziger, 2009). Senior executives experienced shorter tenure positions and lack of advancement track (Stybel & Peabody, 2007). Long-term unemployment was especially problematic for older workers (Rix, 2001). Age discrimination as well as lack of current job skills affected the duration of unemployment for older workers (Pynoos & Liebig, 2009).

**Unemployment and gender differences.** A recent study of unemployed adults (Wootin & Valenti, 2008) suggests there is little difference between gender and psychological reactions. Their research was designed to address the lack of consensus on the subject of gender and psychological effects of unemployment. By controlling for age, ethnic background, marital status, education, tenure, salary, job classification, and financial strain, the study confirmed little significant difference between affective reaction to neither unemployment nor attribution for the job loss between males and females. Wootin and Valenti (2008) advised career counselors avoid overgeneralization of women’s reactions to unemployment. Creed, King, Hood, and McKenzie (2009) argued that in a population of unemployed Australian workers, individual differences in goal setting and self-regulation accounted for a meaningful difference in job-seeking intensity. Their research did not emphasize gender differences; instead, the findings supported the necessity of personal agency strongly contributing to success in job seeking (Creed et al., 2009).

**Summary of Younger Baby Boom Generation and Contemporary Job Market**

Human resources literature describes two sides of the 21st century workplace concerning challenges presented by the baby boom generation (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). On the one hand, the number of workers available for employment is a valuable resource for industries faced with a shortage of human resources under 50 years of age. The baby boom generation has the job skills, education, and work ethic sought by employers (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008;
Fishman, 2010; Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2012). On the other hand, the size of the aging employee pool stresses key human resource programs in organizations, including but not limited to employee health care and retirement programs (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). Baby boom employees who are not willing to change or update technical skills are viewed as a drain on the organization and block the advancement of younger workers who may be more skilled or creative (Godshalk, 2006). Individuals who address the dichotomy represented by the baby boom generation increase the opportunities for successful career decision making.

**Human Development**

Theorists who focus on the changes that occur over a lifetime have a number of perspectives on development. A contemporary definition of adult development suggests the complexity of the concept. Human development models seek to explain systematic, qualitative changes (Hoare, 2009). Human ability and behavior change due to interactions between multiple systems, genetics, adaptation, and personal interests (Hoare, 2009). Since vocational behavior occurs within the normal course of maturation, human development models provide context for vocational maturation.

Hoare (2009) explains adult development at the individual and cohort level. Each individual has unique differences and when the collection of individuals is studied as a cohort, the heterogeneity of the group is apparent. Some adults will have similar roles and motivations, while others will never experience those roles or type of motivation. The correct understanding of adult development considers key influences of “inherited givens, epigenetics, environmental contexts, experiences, intentional choices, and inclinations” (Hoare, 2009, p. 75). Contemporary
human development is best comprehended by a combination of two models of human
development: contextual and life stage models (Hoare, 2009).

For the purpose of the present inquiry, Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human
development (2005) and Erikson’s psychosocial stages of development (1959) provide
frameworks for the research question. Bronfenbrenner’s model posits that development extends
to individuals and groups as generations. Human development is investigated by looking at
phenomena and experience to understand continuity and change in the biopsychosocial
characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Erikson’s focus on psychosocial development addresses
eight stages of development. Specifically, the present inquiry is concerned with adult
development, the period represented by the younger baby boom adults (Erikson, 1959). Gender
is not differentiated in the two models, as if adult development were the same experience
regardless of gender.

A third model, Gilligan’s psychological theory of women’s development, provides the
framework for the conceptualization of gender influence during adult development. Gilligan
(1982) asserts women’s development contributes to relational feelings of responsibility for
others. The relational characteristic may be influential in the career decisions and well-being of
late midlife women (Vandewater & Stewart, 2006). The theories provide a conceptual
framework to understand career choice as one milestone in the sequence of events which occur
during the life span.

**Bioecological Theory of Human Development**

Bronfenbrenner’s theory of human development has expanded (2005). The evolving
nature of the model accepts that biopsychological characteristics of human beings are both
continuous and changing. The model examines the experience of the person living in the
environment both objectively and subjectively. Individuals and groups are subject to the external influences of the environment. At the same time, individuals are also subject to the experience, as Bronfenbrenner describes the range of subjective feelings. The subjective feelings include positive and negative thoughts, hopes, doubts, and personal beliefs. Continuity and change are ever-present through life. A compelling fact of the experiential qualities is the possibility for motivation to develop in the future. Bronfenbrenner claims that the subjective forces evolving in the past are instrumental forces to shaping future development (p. 5).

The subjective forces are not solely responsible for all human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Proximal processes that occur over an extended period of time are considered primary forces for development. The proximal processes may be persons, objects, and symbols in the external environment. The proximal processes exist as interconnected systems at four levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Microsystem is the immediate external environment; the mesosystem is the linkages between the elements in the immediate external environment. The exosystem contains the external environment, the linkage, and an element that factors into the setting but does not contain the individual. The macrosystem is the predominant pattern of ideology influencing the micro-, meso-, and exosystems of a culture or society (p. 80).

The present research is concerned with the significant connection between the various levels of systems. Prior research models demonstrate the usefulness of understanding human development as an experience that is continuous and changing over an extended period of time. The population of the present research is meaningful due to the unique combination of proximal processes of gender, employment status, and generation. The present inquiry seeks to explore both the contextual (bioecological) and the stage (psychosocial) understanding of adult
development. The present research also seeks to understand career decision-making within the stage of middle adulthood while completing psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation (Erikson, 1959).

**Lifespan Theories of Development**

Erikson (1959) identified eight stages of human psychosocial development. The individual experiences and completes “psychosocial crises” at each stage. If the person completes the progression successfully, a related strength develops. When the stage is not completed successfully, the strength does not develop and the person cycles through an earlier stage. Based on the age of the participants in this research, the corresponding stage is named “Middle Adulthood.” Lifespan theory is specific about the sequence of stages and the fact that the work of each stage builds on the earlier stage(s). The timing of the stages may vary widely, but the order of the stages is fixed (Erikson, 1959). The psychosocial crisis of Adulthood is Generativity vs. Stagnation. Joan Erikson extended the description of the tasks of the stage of generativity (Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997, Chapter 5). The tasks associated with the stage include work, family, community, and the associated goals that come with those responsibilities. The narrative about this stage concludes “toward the end of this demanding period one may feel an urge to withdraw somewhat, only to experience a loss of the stimulus of belonging, of being needed,” which may lead to feeling “useless or stagnant” (Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997, p. 112). A number of researchers acknowledge that generativity is not unique to a single generation at midlife but applies to midlife regardless of generation (Stewart & Torges, 2006).

Stewart and Torges (2006) specify generative tasks that may be more specific to the baby boom generation. They recognize the caretaker role for aging parents as well as offspring as a “new need for caregiving” (p. 36), in essence increasing the generative responsibilities for the
baby boom generation. Stewart and Torges (2006) attribute baby boomer’s heightened social responsibility to a pronounced desire to perform generative tasks; even more than what is considered normative in middle age. The parents of the baby boomers are highly likely to enjoy unprecedented longevity which creates the need for elder care options. The baby boom middle age offspring may assume the generative task (Stewart & Torges, 2006). Baby boom adult daughters fulfill the cultural norm of filial responsibility and provide direct care for nearby elders (Caputo, 2002). Stewart and Torges (2006) question the younger baby boom degree of social responsibility imbued during their adolescent experience of materialism and conservatism during the seventies and eighties. They speculate that younger baby boom middle age adults “may turn inward” due to their identity formation occurring in the seventies and eighties instead of during the collectivist movement of the late sixties (Stewart & Torges, 2006, p. 37). The psychological distinctiveness based on generations is not completely clear (Stewart & Torges, 2006). They suggest more research of social historical experience to establish whether there is a division between the cohorts within the baby boom generation (Stewart & Torges, 2006). The research may find that unemployed younger baby boom women concentrate on generativity while making career decisions even though those thoughts conflict with economic necessity.

Identity development in lifespan development theory. In addition to the psychosocial crisis of middle adulthood, lifespan theory studies identity development as a psychosocial crisis that occurs during adolescence (Erikson, 1959). The sense of identity is established as the adolescent experiences the changing self-images, finally resolved by adopting and committing to one role or one self. Work and the activities performed while working also contribute to constructing overall identity (Erikson, 1959). Aging may renew the focus on existential purpose modifying identity (Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997). Torges, Stewart, and Miner-Rubino (2005)
found that life course corrections were not as important to those who were age 60. The period of time in late middle age was focused on learning from previous experiences. Even so, adults at this stage are less focused on taking any corrective actions at this later stage (Torges et al., 2005). Unemployed younger baby boom women may be torn by the desire to renew a dormant search for identity that was not formerly addressed in adolescence and preparation for resignation at age 60.

**Gender and adult development.** Gilligan’s (1982) research explicated distinct differences in identity formation due to gender. Gilligan utilized what she called “inner voice,” specifically psychological narratives, fairy tales, and interviews to formulate a theory of female identity development. For example, this work used the abortion dilemma in a series of interviews with women requesting information about their decision-making processes, including the way they made the decision as well as how they were dealing with the potential decision, the conflicts entailed, and the ways this decision impacted their relationships with others. This study is one example of the interview design that led Gilligan to conclude that personality differences were due to the attachment differences of females. Women have a relational focus that is defined as a desire to be perceived as skilled communicators, caring, empathic, and service oriented (Gilligan, 1982). Career decisions that are based on adolescent identity development would emphasize the relational focus. This is consistent with the observation made by Thorndike (1911) regarding women’s career choices from fields that emphasize an interest in persons and their feelings. Adolescent identity development differs for men and women.

Vandewater and Stewart (2006) tested an adult development model to explore differences in aging between males and females at late midlife. The sample in this study was largely White but heterogeneous socioeconomically. The empirical study found that women who successfully
incorporated family and professional social roles during adolescent identity development facilitated well-being in late middle age. Adolescent female identity development incorporated generative tasks of care-taking and work roles in earlier stages of the lifespan. Adolescent men did not incorporate family roles with work roles and during late midlife experienced anxiety about aging. Identity formation is a recursive career decision-making task for late middle age adults. Females experience less anxiety in late middle age because the generative caregiver role is historically resolved during adolescence and early adulthood (Vandewater & Stewart, 2006).

**Summary of adult development.** The present inquiry accepts that adult development is a multifaceted concept. One model does not adequately capture the contemporary vision of adult development (Hoare, 2009). In fact, the incorporation of a third model specifically seeks to tease out the feminine epistemology embedded in the conceptualization of the framework for the present inquiry. The present inquiry is significant since the research question seeks to understand the experience of career decision making of females who are 51 to 61 years old and unemployed. Career research has not fully explored this particular research question.

**Career Decision Making**

There are myriad models to explain career decision making. Early in the history of career decision making, counseling focused on matching personal characteristics to certain careers. As the field matured, alternative explanations for career decision making became viable for career decisions that were not explicated by the earlier theories. The following review provides a brief summary of relevant career counseling theories and related research impacting the present inquiry.
Career Counseling Theories

Understanding oneself is the primary purpose of career counseling (Super, 1957). Traditional career counseling models emphasize “vocational interests, skills, personality, values, and perceived abilities” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, p. 149). Super (1957) recommends avoiding a trial and error approach to finding a career. The ability to clarify vocational aspirations is a maturational goal reflected in the individual’s ability to adapt. The individual selects a career through self-understanding and knowledge of occupations. The individual will “move directly forward in his career, rather than flounder about before getting his bearings” (Super, 1957, p. 113). Within this context, career counselors who utilize trait-and-factor theories guide the client to greater self-awareness.

Holland (1973) sorts individuals into six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional based on assessments that increase self-awareness. The information that contributes to the self-awareness is the assessment of personality, interests, and ability. One premise of this theory is that individuals can be sorted into careers because individuals in a career are similar enough that the group has certain characteristics which define the occupation (Holland, 1973). Super (1957) and Holland (1973) explain sorting into careers based on personality, but a third theory known as Gottfredson’s Model of Occupational Aspirations (1981) explains development of career aspirations tempered by self-concept. Individuals conceive of careers in relation to gender, type of work, and level of work. As a developmental theory, the self-concept influences the career choice. Further, Gottfredson (1981) was able to explain why an individual may have all of the favorable indicators for a career, but still choose another option that fits a stereotypical role based on gender. The cognitive aspect of the theory is relevant to the examination of internal voice; however, the ages addressed by the
theory identify adolescence as a final stage of development (Gottfredson, 1981). This theory lends credence to the fact that some sorting into occupations is evident. The three theories are helpful to understand the intricacies of career choice based on gender. Ronzio (2012) addressed the complexity of issues faced by the increasing numbers of middle adulthood women making career transitions. The unstable economy challenges career counselors to attend to the traditional needs for occupational information and career assessment as well as “individualized interventions” (Duys et al., 2008, p. 238).

Amundson et al. (2010) found that the preoccupation with trait-and-factor career counseling approaches did not attend to the scholarly understanding of the career decider’s perspective in the decision-making literature. The factors that drive the decision-making process have not been well researched. Amundson et al. called for a better understanding of the career decision-maker’s subjective experience. The experience of making career decisions depends on a combination of factors “situated within cultural, social, historical, and economic contexts” (Amundson et al., 2010, p. 337). Athanasou (2003) investigated job choice factors in an uncertain labor market and found that there is a great deal of individuality in career choice. The present inquiry attends to the gaps in the literature suggested by these two sources.

One career theory that suggests that the individual’s thoughts provide paths to understanding career decisions is social cognitive theory. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) relies less on personality and interest assessments and assesses cognitive–person variables. SCCT is attributed to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000). SCCT is rooted in Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Lent & Brown, 1996). Lent et al. (2000) describes SCCT as a theory that “focuses on several cognitive-person variables (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals), and on how these variables interact with other aspects of the person and his or her
environment (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social supports, and barriers) to help shape the course of career development” (Lent et al., 2000, p. 36). Each individual objectively or subjectively perceives the various factors in the process of making a career decision (Lent et al., 2000). The personal attributes either increase or decrease the self-efficacy and personal agency of an individual. Self-efficacy beliefs refer to “people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Lent and Brown (1996) recommend SCCT because it “emphasizes cognitive and experiential processes” which are not explicitly focused on by other career models that utilize interests, abilities, and goals to ascertain career development decisions (p. 311). Two empirical studies designed to look at self-efficacy and perfectionism serve as theoretical applications in career decision making.

The first study investigated whether career decision making was related to individual’s attribute of perfectionism (Ganske & Ashby, 2007). The research population consisted of university students (mean age was 22.9 years) and predominately White women. The authors found that the level of perfectionism impacted the ability to make a career decision. The subjective self-evaluation could improve or hinder the career development process. “Changing careers could be difficult for those persons with very high standards for themselves” (Ganske & Ashby, 2007, p. 25).

The second study found that negative thinking, perfectionism, and career indecision were linked (Andrews et al., 2014). Negative thinking, perfectionism, and career indecision also lead to depression. Assessing the extent of negative thinking and perfectionism suggests appropriate interventions to improve career decision making. The research suggests that counselors who attend to the cognitive distortions, emotions, and self-efficacy may be able to respond with an
appropriate intervention to improve career decision making (Andrews et al., 2014). The recommendations for further research include study of different age groups to determine if the relationship between career thoughts, emotions, and self-efficacy is stable during the lifespan.

**Women and Career Decision Making**

The younger baby boom women targeted in the present inquiry would have been entering the lifespan stage of young adulthood (as defined by Erikson, 1959) between 1973 and 1982. In the early 1970’s, American women did not have many choices when it came to careers (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000). Women working outside the home comprised only about one third of the national workforce (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000). An early researcher, Osipow (1975), observed “men had careers and women (did) not” (p. 3). Women now figure into the American workforce in large numbers. Researchers seek to understand female career development to inform social service providers, employers, social and economic policy makers, the general public, and women themselves (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000). As the number of women in the workforce has grown, so has the interest in women’s career development research. Fitzgerald and Harmon (2000) acknowledge that many of the issues addressed by Osipow’s research of vocational psychology and career development continue to be central to the current understanding of women and work. But they also stress that the “changing relationship of women and work” influences the issues of 21st century research on the subject of the career psychology of women (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000, p. 208).

After sorting the plethora of career development literature, the topic of women and career choice can be narrowed into conceptual, theoretical, and empirical research. The literature reveals that female career decisions are complicated by gender role orientation, employment inequities, and family responsibilities (Coogan & Chen, 2007; Shapiro, Ingols, & Blake-Beard,
The population of research participants varies, but seldom is the population of interest the same as the age of the women in the present inquiry (i.e., between 51 and 60 years of age exclusively). Along with the key findings for each research study, the ages represented in the publication will also be identified because the research subject’s age and gender are important elements of the present inquiry. The following resources represent key findings on the factors of women and career decision making.

**Gender role, employment inequity, and family responsibility.** One of the earlier empirical studies that tested the relationship of personal agency, problem-solving appraisal, and traditionality of career choice focused on undergraduate and graduate women, mean age 23.4 years old (McCracken & Weitzman, 1997). Traditionality of career choice is defined as those occupations which women represented 70% or greater participation. The correlational design and age group of the population limit the application to the present inquiry, but the findings are relevant. McCracken and Weitzman (1997) investigated the influence of personal attitudes, employment decisions, and family responsibilities. Women who planned for nontraditional careers were more confident in their career choice and ability to manage multiple family roles. The authors argued that the women were more aware of the difficulties of entering their nontraditional field, and the rational decision making style is evident in their personal agency. The researchers speculated that women who had low levels of self-confidence were less successful at problem solving and may rely on others to influence the career choice and understand the potential to manage multiple roles of worker and lifestyle. McCracken and Weitzman (1997) suggest that women who seek the advice of others when planning to pursue a male-dominated career may be expressing their relational self-identity (e.g., Gilligan, 1982). Women who are moderately dependent on advice from others may experience more realistic
career planning and utilize role models to their advantage. Their findings suggest that independence in planning and decision making is not a perfect linear conceptualization. Moderate to low levels of confidence led to more realistic multiple role commitments (McCracken & Weitzman, 1997).

Roberts and Friend (1998) researched gender identity and career momentum of a sample of middle-aged women from the Mills Longitudinal Study (Helson & Wink, 1992). The population is similar in age and gender to the present inquiry; the women were in their early 50s during the time of the research. The research question explored whether career momentum patterns were related to the women’s simultaneous life context, identity structure, personality, and psychological well-being. The research participants were sorted into career momentum categories based on their current employment or lack of employment. Those who were not employed or who were retired fell into the low career momentum category. An objective measure of career momentum confirmed that the careers plateaued for the women in their 50s. Subjective measures refuted the decline in career momentum for women who were engaged in high prestige careers and enjoying “their occupation as a source of stimulation and future possibilities” (Roberts & Friend, 1998, p. 204). The current inquiry considers aspects of the same research question, but departs from the original design due to the lack of longitudinal data and a purposive sampling method to increase diversity in the research population. The Mills sample is college educated and predominately White, representing the older generational cohort of the baby boomers (Roberts & Friend, 1998). Women with high career momentum exhibited more of the personal agency characteristics in their personality over the lifetime. “The low momentum women were consistently low on self-acceptance, independence, and well-being across the 30 years preceding the assessment of career momentum” (Roberts & Friend, 1998, p.
The final conclusions caution against assessing career momentum based merely on personality traits or life experiences. The subjective feeling of career momentum is better evaluated by the combination of occupational prestige, personality, and developmental age (Roberts & Friend, 1998). The present inquiry may elicit similar results but with an adjustment for the current historical, socioeconomic, and cultural factors involved with women who are unemployed and in their 50s during the early 21st century.

Moving to a more contemporary example of personal agency and career choice, Shapiro et al. (2008) address contemporary career decisions of women prior to seeking employment or during the employment tenure. The conceptual piece addresses issues faced by women at any age when faced by the dualistic nature of career choice often associated with being female: whether to work or not. The authors acknowledge a group of women desire to step away from a “career primary” paradigm for an interrupted career track. Organizations could also impose an interruption in the career primary track. The role of gender creates a contradiction due to the labeling of the interrupted career pattern labeled as the “mommy track.” If the organization imposes an interruption to the career, the women who take time off are also labeled as being less ambitious or committed. Even if the employment disruption is due to economic reality of the job market, the women are viewed differently and must consider whether the time off creates an impression of less professional responsibility than men. Negative perceptions are tied to the socialized gender expectations. Shapiro et al. (2008) suggest that women overcome the negative stereotype of the less committed mommy track by framing the career decision as a benefit to the organization. As the workforce continues to adapt to the changing labor market, the authors also suggest that women should continue to challenge the norms regarding what commitment means in terms of career. Lastly, the authors remind the women to maintain a strong sense of career
identity by continuing professional associations and associating with a professional field or job title. The conceptual piece reflects the need for women to embrace the attitude of personal agency (Shapiro et al., 2008). The counseling field is reminded of the changing needs of the job market and the benefits of personal agency in career choice.

O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) utilized a qualitative, inductive research approach to study women’s career experiences over the life span. The findings support a model of career phases linked to age. The mean age of the women who participated in the research is 42 years of age, younger than the population of the present inquiry. The research participants describe the interaction of personal agency, career context (i.e., societal, organizational, and relational factors), and career beliefs within the career phases. The findings emphasize career decisions for age groups in mid-life between 40 and 45 years of age (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). The research explores a career phase of a specific period of middle adulthood (50-59 years of age) within a particular socio-historical context. O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) recommend further research to examine whether their findings apply to their particular sample or withstand the contextual elements of women’s lives that change based on society and cultural norms.

Durante, Griskevicius, Simpson, Cantú, and Tybur (2012) also focused on the role gender played in career choice. They argue that the ratio of adult men to adult women in the local population affects career decisions. The empirical study was conducted at a public university with undergraduate female sample (mean age 20.91 years of age). Women who are in geographical areas with a low male population respond by delaying or never marrying. The women will typically seek well-paying jobs since they do not have financial security and fewer prospects of marriage. Shapiro (2010) suggests that single mothers participate in this behavior when they seek employment to financially support their offspring. The relevant conclusions for
the research highlight the attention that females focus on the ability to provide for the offspring. Durante et al. (2012) suggest that well educated women may be more likely to marry later or not at all but still decide to have children. The population in Durante et al.’s research lacks important diversity in education and socioeconomic status but supports the female as the caretaker role. Durante et al. concludes that “women must decide whether to juggle both parenting and a demanding career or focus more on childrearing” (p. 130). The authors suggest that women in other settings, including impoverished neighborhoods in the United States, may seek other alternatives for domestic responsibilities. Women who do not have the financial ability to support offspring could bind together with other women to provide financial security, or rely on extended family for financial and childrearing help. This is an example of empirical research that investigates relations between family responsibilities and career choice of women.

Whitmarsh and Wentworth (2012) utilized a large sample of newly married couples to determine if gender or socioeconomic status was more influential on career choice. The sample was purposely selected to represent higher education status and socioeconomic status. The findings presented mixed results. The researchers designed the study to focus on the traditionality of careers. The researchers purposely selected a population that was slightly older than the college population that is often used for career development research. The legal field was the only career field that met criteria for significance on the shift from traditionally male to more female (Whitmarsh & Wentworth, 2012). Women in business and finance careers are increasing in those career fields depending on which portion of the United States is measured. Regional variations draw attention to the job market exposure that adolescents and young adults have during formative years (Whitmarsh & Wentworth, 2012). The authors also suggest that both genders are making contemporary career decisions based on salary (emphasizing higher
salaries) and work-life balance. The women in this sample were attentive to balancing integration of work and family life. Gilligan’s (1982) sex-role socialization during adolescent identity development is apparent in the eventual career choices. The researchers cite limitations of this study: more research is needed for career trends over the lifespan as opposed to career entry and samples should be more economically, culturally, and psychologically diverse (Whitmarsh & Wentworth, 2012). Notably the career choices were made in 2004 and 2005, a more contemporary reflection of gender and career choice.

The top industries for career growth in the 21st century are science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Department of Labor BLS, 2011-12). A longitudinal study of factors related to persistence in a science-related career sheds light on the differences between females and males based on career choice (Farmer, Wardrop, Anderson, & Risinger, 1995). The researchers used a sample of research participants in high school during 1980 that desired careers in science, math, or technology. In 1990, 36% of the females and 46% of the males persisted in a STEM career. The researchers provided two conclusions from the 1990 data. First, the empirical study indicated that females who took elective science courses in high school would persist in science careers but at rates below the comparable male population. Second, as women increased in career commitment, career choice shifted from science-related careers (Farmer et al., 1995). The researchers suggest the data support social cognitive theory to explain the career choice process. Additional research is suggested by the researchers to measure the effect of math self-efficacy in the model of career decision making; interviews are also suggested to “untangle some of the puzzles surrounding women’s career choices” (Farmer et al., 1995, p. 169). The present inquiry has elements of these same recommendations: some of the population may have been in high school in 1980 and as part of the exploration of current
thoughts, assumptions, and opinions, the effect of the math and science self-efficacy might arise when coding the themes.

Quimby and DeSantis (2006) inspected self-efficacy and role model influence as predictors of career choice in a population of female undergraduates. The empirical study supported role model influence as the major predictor of career choice for five of the six Holland types (i.e., Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional). Investigative careers such as those in science, technology, and math fields had no relationship between role model influence and female career choice (Quimby & DeSantis, 2006). The researchers argue that the result could be attributed to the lack of female role models in Investigative careers. Career role models have a greater impact when the person is similar to the individual exploring the career (Quimby & DeSantis, 2006). The career role model is also more effective when the role model demonstrates the ability to manage multiple roles (Quimby & DeSantis, 2006). For the purpose of the research, there may be fewer unemployed female younger baby boomers to provide role models making career choices during this life stage. The phenomena of role model exposure impacting career choice may be more salient with younger women.

Middle age women and career choice. The scholarly body of literature is less profuse when the population of the research is limited to women 50 to 59 years of age seeking future employment. Ronzio (2012) supports the exploration of psychosocial factors within a developmental perspective when counseling adult women in transition. Counselors who attend to the psychosocial developmental perspective are able to explore issues including family and relationships, physical and mental health, and contextual stressors. Ronzio (2012) lists contextual stressors as economic hardship, unemployment, minority status, gender inequities, and age discrimination. The present inquiry introduces gender, social, and historical contextual
stressors by isolating the research population to one generation unit, namely the younger baby boom women.

Bendien’s (2013) qualitative study of older women was conducted in the Netherlands with retired women between 60 and 80 years of age. The research design employed retrospective narrative to understand the gendered nature of career choice. The non-linear career path of the research subjects is a contrast to the chronologically oriented interview. The primary research subject’s career story breaks into meaningful temporal units which are interpreted as a theme of self-care as career identity (Bendien, 2013). The research findings use a retrospective narrative which is interpreted as “non-linear and arhythmical careers of women from the older generation” (Bendien, 2013, p. 717). Bendien speculates that the career trajectories are not aberrations, but are “probably still recognizable within the current generation of working women” (p. 717). The present inquiry explores the generational unit within the baby boomers that is currently between the ages of 51-60 years of age.

In light of the small number of research studies of career decision making in the older adult women population, specifically women between 51 and 60 years of age, it may be relevant to discuss employment in late middle age as a choice to delay retirement. One example of this approach is a qualitative study focused on the meaning of retirement for women between 45 and 60 years of age in Australia (Onyx & Benton, 1996). The decision to retire is not a systematic plan but rather a response to financial security and work-life balance. Notably, the date of the research is relevant, since it is prior to the Recession of 2007 and assumes a retirement age of 60. The findings delineate the criteria for ideal career choices after age 45 (Onyx & Benton, 1996). Women in this research preferred “more creative and satisfying engagement with the many sides of life and self” (Onyx & Benton, 1996, p. 32). Though the research focused on professional
career women in Australia, given the similarity of cultures it is likely to be informative for the present inquiry.

**Counseling theory supported by research on women and career choice.** The previous scholarly research suggests the complicated career choice issues that gender introduces into career counseling in the 21st century. Coogan and Chen (2007) suggest several counseling theories that are most relevant for counseling practice based on the barriers associated with women and career choice. Gottfredson’s (1981) theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation; Super’s (1957) life-span, life-space theory; and the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) have been introduced earlier in the literature review as theoretical background for the present inquiry. The additional information presented here will elucidate the contemporary application of counseling theory to practice.

**Gottfredson’s theory.** Gottfredson’s (1981) theory postulates that children learn and accept career stereotypes as early as age 6 to 8 years old. The stereotypes limit exploration and essentially overshadow any benefit gained by exploring interests or social prestige of careers. Gender identity becomes the predominant influence in career identity. Rather than step outside the norm, females pursue those careers that feel comfortable or meet socially accepted gender roles (Coogan & Chen, 2007; Gottfredson, 1981). Wee (2014) studied Gottfredson’s theory with two mixed gender populations, one population were college seniors and the second population a group of individuals recruited online to complete the online simulated occupational choice task. The second population represented a wide range of ages from 18 to over 46 years of age. The results were generally supportive of Gottfredson’s theory. Women’s responses to job choice protected the gender identity when job prestige was threatened. The final recommendation based on the research is career choice is moderated by gender identity and prestige over vocational
interests (Wee, 2014). Coogan and Chen (2007) note that Gottfredson’s theory “incorporates sociology into the study of vocational and career psychology” (p. 196). The present inquiry may be able to identify cognitive effects consistent with Wee’s empirical research.

**Super’s life-span, life-space theory.** Coogan and Chen (2007) support the application of Super’s (1957) life-span and life-space theory to contemporary career counseling of women. Key principles of the theory are the constructs of self-concept, life roles, and the career development cycle. The career development cycle is recursive as necessary adjustments are made during the life-span. Among other elements, the self-concept includes gender roles, described by Super (1957). Coogan and Chen (2007) draw a direct relationship between the gender identity implicit in self-concept. Statistics confirm that gender predicts the career choice due to stereotypes of traditional jobs. Super’s model also provides a framework for addressing the choice barrier presented by satisfying the need for life-work balance and career choice (Coogan & Chen, 2007). Last, the recursive series of stages that accompany the modern volatile career path addresses the barriers concerned with family and employment responsibilities (Coogan & Chen, 2007). The three key principles align with the present inquiry’s theoretical framework explored by the qualitative interviews.

**Social cognitive career theory.** The last theory suggested by Coogan and Chen (2007) is fundamental to the framework for this present inquiry of younger baby boom career choice as a result of unemployment. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) was introduced in an earlier theoretical framework reference. Here I will elaborate on the use of SCCT as suggested by Coogan and Chen for counseling women considering career choices. Empirical research previously reported in contemporary findings demonstrates how self-efficacy and personal agency are central to the career decisions of women. Coogan and Chen (2007) add further
applications of SCCT especially salient for women’s environmental and social contexts of
decision making. Women’s physical attributes, environment, and learning experiences are
contextual variables that are potential barriers to career choice. Within the theory, counselors
have an opportunity to recognize the effect and importance of the variables in the final career
decision. Lastly, SCCT addresses the person’s personality characteristics that relate to the ability
to cope with barriers to career choice (Coogan & Chen, 2007).

**Happenstance as career choice method.** In a slightly broader view of career counseling
and decision making, Krumboltz (2009) proposed Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT). This
particular theory explains the career decision-making process characterized by a random event
that precipitates a change in employment or career direction. Compared to previous career
counseling theories, HLT is rather new. The theory acknowledges that an individual is not
always responsible for a precipitating event although that event may influence career choices.

Counselors should attend to the client’s personal and professional aspirations in order to
encourage a lifelong approach toward career development. Career counseling is not intended to
culminate in a single career for a lifetime. To accomplish this goal, the client participates in
assessments, but not for the purpose of matching, rather for the exploration of evolving
possibilities. This activity generates unplanned actions and leads to options to explore. Success
in career counseling is judged by the result in the world, not by a sterile assessment of counseling
objectives. HLT is novel in the recognition of the “interaction of planned and unplanned actions
in response to self-initiated and circumstantial situations . . . so complex that the consequences
are virtually unpredictable and can best be labeled as happenstance” (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 136).

HLT continues to be developed through the construction and validation of a new
assessment tool recognizing chance as an influence of career choice (Kim, et al., 2014).
Betsworth and Hansen (1996) sampled elderly adults to determine the frequency of chance events influencing career choice during their lifetime. They reported that over half of the sample could identify chance events as influential in their careers. Women were more likely to attribute their career choice to a change in marital status due to death or divorce of the spouse. Women also were more likely to attribute their marriage and family as the source of change, for example lifestyle, homemaking, and nonwork activities. Colleagues, mentors, and friends were also influential in creating career opportunity for both sexes (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996). More empirical research is suggested for the future, especially as the world of work has introduced change as commonplace for adult workers. In fact, the role of chance in career development may be both inevitable and desirable (Kim, B. et al., 2014; Krumboltz, 2009). Support for happenstance career theory may be even more evident within the research population of the present inquiry. This last study concludes the summary of relevant research of what is known about women and career choice.

The future of career choice research. Career development research has a long tradition of quantitative methods. Stead et al. (2012) call for qualitative research methodologies in order to “open avenues for new understandings of the world of work” (p. 107). The social constructionist interpretive framework seeks to understand individual’s world of living and working (Creswell, 2013). The social constructivist framework is subjective, often complex, and reveals greater possibilities of meaning. The subjective meanings arise within a social and historical context (Creswell, 2013).

Cohen et al. (2004) argue in favor of a social constructivist framework. Two research studies examine social constructivism as a research context. The first focuses on career transitions of professional women and the second focuses on mixed gender studies of scientists...
The interpretative and qualitative research design produced data to illustrate the contributions of social constructivist research methods to the field of career development in three thematic findings. The first theme challenges the former notion of careers as linear progression. The interview data of both research populations (e.g., professional women and scientists) support a paradox of continuity and change. The worker is subjected to factors that objectively figure into career development and subjectively value the family and lifestyle factors. The second theme contextualizes career within personal and professional roles and responsibilities for both research populations. Notably, the second theme is compared to sociological examination of “social structures and human activity, about determinism, free will, and power” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 417). The third theme dwells on power and belief systems in career meaning. Both research populations differentiated between autonomy and the conflict presented by social rules of the meaning of individual work values. For example, women may strike out to leave an organization to seek more challenges and personal growth but also be driven by social forces such as work attachment and promotional opportunities (Cohen et al., 2004). The social constructionist analysis ideally suits the relational focus of the workplace (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004). “A relational perspective to understanding work behavior moves beyond rational prescriptive approaches to career planning and decision making, by presenting opportunities for re-definitions of identity, work, success, and satisfaction” (Blustein et al., 2004, p. 436).

**Relational approaches to career decision making.** Fitzgerald and Harmon (2000) update Osipow’s career decision-making framework. The career decision-making model focuses on factors of social influence that change historically and de-emphasize gender influence in favor of individual factors and less gender stereotypical view of development. The authors favor a
career decision-making model that is purposeful in reflecting the cultural (i.e., United States) and temporal (i.e., postindustrial, 21st century) factors. The model accounts for moderation effects of role overload, role conflict, and inequities for instance, pay inequity (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000). The career decision making model also gives a nod to the lifespan milestones of work and family life, achievement in career, generativity, and implementing work that is relevant to abilities and interests (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000).

Fitzgerald and Harmon’s model is consistent with Ronzio (2012), who discusses the experience of career transition of middle age women and provides recommendations for counseling interventions based on career decisions influenced by psychosocial development. Ronzio (2012) fully supports developmental counseling theories in place of trait and factor theories in order to address physical and emotional health of the middle age women in career transition. The qualitative inquiry explores the interaction of psychosocial factors and career decision making revealed during the interviews of the research participant.

**Career research, middle age, and unemployment.** Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, and Prosser (2004) addressed the psychological resources necessary for career transitions prior to and during unemployment. The research focused on middle age and unemployed adults, average age 44 years old, to understand the concept of career adaptability. As a model for future career research, the qualitative research explored the construct identified as *career adaptability* through the expression of beliefs, emotions, and career search efforts. The research question protocol uses words like *attitude, emotion, and initial reaction* to gather data about the client voice (Ebberwein et al., 2004). The researchers focused on the period of time prior to losing a job, and then the period of time during the job search. The clients who anticipated the job transition were better prepared emotionally than those who were less supported or unrealistic in their
expectations (Ebberwein et al., 2004). For the research, client beliefs, emotions, and experiences will provide the data to explore the meaning of career decision making for unemployed women in the younger baby boom cohort.

The 21st century workplace is recognized as “more liberating and all-embracing . . . based on the accumulation of skills and knowledge and the integration of personal and professional life” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 408). The linear career path is waning in favor of a new career trajectory. Individual initiative is more valuable accompanied by less dependence on organizations for career promotions and tenure (Handy, 1994). Researchers who explore the client understanding of the current workplace provide the context for career counseling.

As demonstrated by the variety of previous studies, there is a gap in career decision-making research that applies to females. The research population is homogeneous; the majority of studies utilize a college/university population or adults that are seldom beyond the age of 50. The need for the present inquiry is to explore career decision making relevant to a specific population: female, born between 1955 and 1964, and unemployed. The barriers that are present in much of the previous scholarly research will be explored through the research questions: gender role orientation, employment inequities, and family responsibilities. In addition, the psychosocial factors related to personal agency and the chance events of career choice may be described as influences on the career decision making of the unemployed younger baby boom women.

**Theoretical Foundation of the Study**

The study was a qualitative, exploratory inquiry following the research approach known as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The ontological assumptions of the present study assumed the reality of each participant differed based on their previous experience of
historical and contemporary events influencing career decision making (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) recommends phenomenological researchers analyze individual experiences and the differing realities become the thematic findings. IPA is ideally suited to examine how important experiences in daily living are significant in various ways for individuals (Smith et al., 2009). The research approach draws on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

**Phenomenology**

Philosophical ideas from Husserl and Heidegger form the basis of phenomenology. IPA is the study of lived experiences of individuals (Finlay, 2011; van Manen, 1990). The term phenomenologically inspired is appropriate to emphasize identifying meanings and understanding phenomenon (Finlay, 2011). IPA begins with cognition although a holistic focus on lived experience is more faithful to the IPA approach. Going beyond cognition requires sensitivity, emotional instincts, and vigorous in-depth examination of the experience designed to explore and understand the lived experience (Finlay, 2011). Husserl’s influence leads the researcher to suspend judgment until reality is confirmed (Creswell, 2013). Heidegger expands the perspective to acknowledge the inevitable task of relating to each other and making sense of each other (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger is recognized as representing a hermeneutic emphasis.

**Hermeneutics**

IPA and hermeneutics are bound as an understanding of what the context of a narrative is and how that narrative is understood in the present day (Smith et al., 2009). Interpretation of texts is the simplest definition of hermeneutics. Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer contributed to the literature of this philosophical underpinning. Researchers in the social sciences must carefully consider how the interpretive element of phenomenological oriented
research is employed. Smith et al. (2009) summarize the meaning of interpretation that is attributed to the three hermeneutic philosophers.

According to Smith et al. (2009), Schleiermacher interpreted text at two levels. The first level is the exact interpretation of the textual meaning. The second level is the art of interpretation which is meaningful for psychological interpretation of text. When the researcher engages in this level of interpreting the text, the researcher is expected to understand the individual meaning of an experience. Schleiermacher views the relationship between the individual and the researcher as a pathway to understanding the unconscious meanings of a phenomenon. “The interpretive analyst is able to offer a perspective on the text which the author is not” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 23). This view represents the intersubjective dimension of phenomenological philosophy.

Smith et al. (2009) explain the manner of understanding Heidegger’s explication of phenomenology as interpretation. Heidegger argued that phenomenology was both a perception of an experience and the result of analytical thinking that occurred while the researcher comprehended the meaning of the text. The researcher is subject to his or her own prior experiences, assumptions, and preconceived ideas. Heidegger cautions the researcher to avoid slipping into comfortable interpretations based on self-conception. The researcher is to maintain a scientific attitude and interpret the text in terms of the original source (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger’s practice is also called bracketing. Bracketing is essential in phenomenology in general and specifically in IPA as a requirement to analyze the interpretation of text as closely to the original meaning (Smith et al., 2009).

A third contributor was recognized by Smith et al., (2009) for his influence on hermeneutics. Gadamer refines the understanding of interpretation of text. Gadamer’s
Hermeneutics aims to analyze the original meaning of the individual but assumes that the inherent difficulties of human understanding are the fact that preconceptions exist. Gadamer argues that the researcher strives for the essential meaning of the experience but while searching for that meaning, the only path to understanding is through preconceptions. The researcher is the messenger and serves as a mechanism for delivering the truth without embellishment from the preconception. To be successful, the researcher must be open to listening and perform interviews in a manner that forecloses judgment prior to eliciting the full text (Smith et al., 2009). Gadamer remains steadfast in his opinion that interpretation of the text is fundamentally grounded in the meaning of the text and secondarily grounded in the understanding of the person. This distinction was important to completing the analysis of the transcriptions of the interviews. Analysis of the text is often described within the cycle called the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). The extensive description and application of the hermeneutic circle to this present inquiry is described in chapter three.

**Idiography**

Idiography is a research approach that seeks to explain the unique (Babbie, 2010). The purpose is to substantially explain the particular condition or event. Smith et al. (2009) cite two manifestations of the particular. The first is the in depth analysis of the texts. The second is the complete understanding of a particular experience in a particular historical moment. Idiography represents the essential in order to explain how an experience has unique meaning for each individual. The idiographic significance of exploring the historical event of unemployed younger baby boom women, combined with the dwindling resources in social security supports the selection of IPA as the research method.
Summary

In general, the younger baby boom generation continues to influence the sequence of life events including the work and wok-related decisions of middle and late adulthood. Bateson (2010) names good health, wisdom, energy, and motivation as some of the attributes of the over-50 year old adult. Those attributes contribute to lengthening the period of time available for employment in the younger baby boom adult life. At the same time, social systems have changed expectations about retirement age. In addition, economic conditions force many younger baby boom workers to remain employed longer than any previous generation. The gap in the literature exists between knowing that retirement is delayed and understanding how unemployed younger baby boom women make career decisions as a result of additional time in the newly extended work history.

Women have additional factors that distinguish their career decision-making experience after the age of 50. Women have interrupted career patterns (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006), lower wages over the lifetime (Hegewisch & Williams, 2013), and are less likely to have prepared for retirement (DeVaney, 1995; Toossi, 2012). Younger baby boom women are often reminded that the resources for healthcare and retirement are stretched (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008) with the large cohort of baby boomers. The women’s career decision-making experiences occur at an important period of time reflecting changing attitudes about work in late middle age. There is little research to understand unemployment at late middle age and especially career decision making after the age of 50 in contemporary social conditions.

Previous career research recognizes the need for understanding the subjective experiences of the individual (Amundson et al., 2010; Athanasou, 2003; Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000). In addition, Stead et al. (2012) call for more qualitative research to understand the contemporary
world of work and the idiographic nature of career decision making. There is a wide array of theoretical explanations for career decision making (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Gottfredson, 1981; Holland, 1973; Krumboltz, 2009; Lent et al., 2000). Much of the research attends to younger populations or gender is secondary to the research question. The gap in the research exists when attempting to understand the career decision-making experience of unemployed women of the younger baby boom generation. The method selected to explore and understand this phenomena is interpretative phenomenological analysis, a qualitative research design.

The qualitative, phenomenological, semi-structured interviews explore attitudes, thoughts, and female epistemology. Gilligan (1993) argues that differences exist between male and female conceptions of self and the experience of conflict and choice. Career decision-making research has juxtaposed age and gender previously, but the present inquiry adds to the research by seeking to understand generational age, gender, and the effect of cognitive and personal variables on career decision making. The implications of significance of this current inquiry include new findings to support counseling interventions which address contemporary decision making of unemployed younger baby boom women. The size of the population as part of the future workforce is significant to social service providers, educational administrators, and social and economic policy makers.
CHAPTER III: METHOD

The purpose of the present study is to explore the complicated career decisions facing unemployed younger baby boom women (Duberly et al., 2014; Onyx & Benton, 1996; Sok, 2010). The baby boom generation has changed the way individuals age, including the trajectory of career decision making (Anderson et al., 2012; Bateson, 2010; Coogan & Chen, 2007). In addition, the 21st century workplace is characterized by change and uncertainty: changing career opportunities and social policies affecting work decisions as well as uncertainty about the recovering economy (Pelsma & Arnett, 2002; Pew Research Center, 2014). Unemployment in late middle age is problematic for women especially in the decade prior to receiving retirement benefits. The problem is that unemployed women over 50 urgently need to hold a job in order to make contributions to retirement plans to assure future retirement income. The women need to make decisions about their future career in light of this problem.

Previous studies of women’s decision making focused on listening to women as a way to understand female decision making. The researchers acknowledged a uniqueness that was identified as a women’s subjective epistemology and considered female development (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982). In addition, Gilligan (1993) recognized gender differences involved in decision making due to identity. Gilligan found that women tend to make decisions in a relational manner.

A growing body of work in women’s career decision-making research explores the importance of the relational paradigm, especially for women and the influence of work-life balance, mothering, and midlife women’s career transition (Motulsky, 2010). Ebberwein et al. (2004) designed a qualitative study to better understand career transition in unemployed middle
age adults. This study found that the subjective experience provided evidence of career adaptability (Ebberwein et al., 2004).

While previous qualitative research has enriched the understanding of career decision making, Motulsky (2010) argues that there is still a need for more career counseling research to explore populations of various age groups, genders, and culture. The research question of the present inquiry addresses a particular age group, gender, and generation with its own cultural significance. This study assumes that reality is socially constructed and people’s perceptions about their career decisions are all valid. Qualitative research honors the social constructivist framework (Creswell, 2013).

The current study employs a qualitative research method to extend career decision-making research based on the subjective experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women.

The central research question is, “How do the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of unemployed younger baby boom women affect their career decision-making experience?”

The related subsidiary questions are:

How do the bioecological spheres of human development affect the career decision-making experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women?

How does the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood affect the career decision-making experience of younger baby boom women?

How does womanhood affect the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women?

What criteria do unemployed younger baby boom women use to evaluate or define vocational alternatives?
The chapter presents the research methodology and specific procedures used in conducting the study. Specifically, the research paradigm, approach, and tradition support the methodological choices of the study. The chapter provides a detailed rationale for selection of interpretative phenomenological analysis and the related data analysis procedure. The chapter concludes with descriptions of the ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

**Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm is a model, or as described by Patton (1990), a general perspective. Social science researchers must consider several defining beliefs in order to decide the appropriate research paradigm. Those beliefs are also recognized as the philosophical orientation of the inquiry. In general, Berg (2007) recommends qualitative research for those research questions that seek answers to questions within social settings. The philosophical framework depends on the researcher’s ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological beliefs.

Vagle (2014) provides clarification of the ontological beliefs of phenomenologists. The lived experience is the focus of the inquiry. The actual living in the world is the subject of the inquiry. Phenomenologists contemplate how it is to be in the experience. Vagle (2014) further clarifies how the current research question connects to the phenomenological orientation. “Phenomenologists . . . are not primarily interested in what humans decide, but rather how they experience their decision-making” (Vagle, 2014, p. 21). One way to understand reality is to question the individuals who live in the social setting about their experience of the phenomena. This is known as the epistemological belief, which in this present inquiry is known as social constructivism (Creswell, 2013).
Social constructivism is the worldview that individuals understand reality subjectively based on experiences of history and culture (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) suggests that this worldview is interested in understanding complex patterns of meaning. Researchers seek to understand the individual’s view of the phenomenon to better understand the historical and cultural settings of the individual. Glesne (2011) describes social constructivism as understanding the perspectives of several members of a social group that experienced the same phenomena in order to understand patterns of thought and action for that group.

Social constructivism’s worldview acknowledges the role of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The researcher’s questions are broad and open for discussion in order to promote interaction between the researcher and the research participant. The researcher concedes that the interpretation may be influenced by her own personal, historical, and cultural experiences. Thus the researcher makes an interpretation of the findings, an interpretation shaped by personal experiences and background. Axiological beliefs in social constructivism lead to valuing and negotiating the final interpretation of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Managing the collaboration and interpretation then becomes an issue of trustworthiness that is discussed later in this chapter. The current inquiry concentrated on understanding the career decision-making experience when particular factors (i.e., gender, age, life stage, generation, unemployment) were present.

**Research Approach**

The phenomenological approach was used to understand the essential “truths” of the lived experience of unemployed younger baby boom women making career decisions. The qualitative approach focuses on the unemployed younger baby boom women’s description of their career decision-making experiences. As stated in the research paradigm, the match between
a constructivist approach and qualitative research was driven by the research question. Qualitative research methodologies created opportunities to explore the individual’s experience of the world of work (Stead et al., 2012).

Smith et al. (2009) advise researchers to choose the purpose of the research and then choose the appropriate approach. Within the research approaches of phenomenology, the research tradition known as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) focuses on individual experience and understanding of the experience. Smith et al. (2009) describes the hierarchy of experiences. The smallest unit of the experience could be considered, but IPA is also appropriate to research experiences that hold larger significance in a person’s life (Smith et al., 2009). Dilthey (1976) describes the larger experience as a “comprehensive unit.” The comprehensive unit is “made up of parts of a life, linked by a common meaning… even when the parts are separated by interrupting events” (Dilthey, 1976, p. 210). The present inquiry is concerned with the hierarchy of experiences of the unemployed younger baby boom women, which led to conducting the research in the tradition of IPA.

**Research Tradition**

Among the different research traditions in qualitative research, the present inquiry is phenomenological oriented, specifically IPA. The chosen research tradition aligns with a constructivist research philosophy within a qualitative research paradigm. The phenomenological research approach suits the research question and more specifically, IPA suits the intended purpose of the research. IPA is influenced by the various phenomenological theorists (Smith et al., 2009). IPA researchers study people who “do things in the world, . . . reflect on what they do, and those actions have meaningful, existential consequences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 34). To further elaborate, this portion of the chapter aligns the research tradition
with the manner of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography which are the foundation of IPA.

**Phenomenological Foundations of IPA**

IPA examines how individuals make sense of major life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. explains that IPA fundamentally focuses on experience and perception in the manner of Husserl’s work in phenomenological philosophy. Although this is the foundation, IPA is also influenced by the work of Heidegger, Merlau-Ponty, and Sartre. Smith et al. explain that the influence of these philosophers moves toward a more interpretive perspective. The “focus on understanding the perspectival directedness of our involvement in the lived world—something which is personal to each of us, but which is a property of our relationships to the world and others . . . (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). For this reason, the IPA research tradition aligns well with the research question of this present inquiry. The phenomenological orientation of IPA attends to the women’s description of their experiences in such a way that meaning comes from the things that happen to them and their activities. Reporting the meaning also involves interpretative involvement.

**Hermeneutic Foundation of IPA**

Smith et al. (2009) explain that making meaning from discourse is known as hermeneutics, an interpretive principle. “Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science which studies persons” (van Manen, 1990, p. 6). Hermeneutics involves the interpretive reporting of the data through the lens of the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). The hermeneutic circle is both iterative and circular, navigating through a path that “allows the new stimulus to speak in its own voice” and recognizes that the researchers’ presumptions could be detrimental to the interpretation (Smith et al., 2009, p. 26). Hermeneutics develop comprehensive understandings
of a phenomenon, requiring the researcher capture an accurate and empathic understanding of the phenomenon through language.

One of the ways to reflect on and interpret the meaning of phenomena is to apply the existentials of lived experience (van Manen, 2014). There are five manners that all humans experience the lived world. Those five lived existentials are lived relation (relationality), lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), and lived things and technology (materiality). These universal themes are expressed as a “silent theme;” the individual alludes to the meaning of each existential when describing the phenomenon but does not necessarily state the theme explicitly (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, it is incumbent on the researcher to guide the hermeneutic analysis through the possible themes during analysis.

**Idiographic Foundation of IPA**

IPA research is idiographic in that it entails searching for and uncovering the details of the person’s experience. IPA is recommended within sociological research on topics including psychological distress, life transitions, and identity (Smith et al., 2009). The present study seeks to understand emotional experiences as well as the developmental experiences of the unemployed younger baby boom women as they make career decisions.

The idiographic nature of IPA contributes to the understanding of an individual and the relation to a particular life experience. IPA acknowledges the significance attached to an experience by an individual, interprets the experience to provide thick meaning (precisely descriptive), and then relates that experience in such a way to share the essential features through detailed reporting (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, given the present research questions, collecting detailed accounts from a small number of women is preferred over using survey data (Smith et al., 2009).
Research Design

The present study focuses on exploring the personal career decision-making experience of a group of unemployed women who share the generational context of history, culture, and economics. The research design allows for participants to describe their personal experiences which are then reflected on and interpreted by the researcher (Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1990). The use of IPA is suitable based on the epistemological position of the research question (Smith et al., 2009). The study’s research questions focused on making sense of career decision-making by unemployed younger baby boom women.

Research Focus

Smith et al. (2009) extend the aims of IPA research to include participant perceptions and views. The IPA researcher more often is exploring an experience and is process oriented. In the current study, the primary research question is guided by phenomenological purpose (van Manen, 2014). IPA research involves secondary research aims that include understanding and investigating (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher is open-minded and seeks to investigate a specified phenomenon. IPA is an inductive procedure and the research questions are not meant to be explanatory. The researcher is not seeking a source of causality (Smith et al., 2009). Once the experiential data are obtained, the researcher reflects in a phenomenological manner to complete analysis (van Manen, 2014).

While the research design is exploratory and seeks to understand career decision making, the researcher intends to understand how particular factors were involved in the experience. Smith et al. (2009) refer to these as secondary, or theory driven questions. The related subsidiary questions arose during the literature review. Smith et al. (2009) recognize that the IPA researcher may have a second-tier of inquiry that may be answered during the interpretive stage.
Qualitative data collection does not guarantee an answer to those second-tier questions. During interpretation, the researcher essentially is answering the question “to what extent can accounts of the decision-making process be explained by theory y” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 48). The questions are intended to understand the existing theories and models. Table 1 illustrates the alignment of the central research question and subsidiary research question with the conceptual framework of existing theories.

Table 1
Alignment of Research Questions and Conceptual Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of unemployed younger baby boom women affect their career decision-making experience?</td>
<td>van Manen guided existential inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the bioecological spheres of human development affect the career decision-making experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women?</td>
<td>Bronfenbrenner bioecological model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood affect the career decision-making experience of younger baby boom women?</td>
<td>Erikson lifespan theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does womanhood affect the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women?</td>
<td>Erikson identity development, Gilligan gender and adult development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What criteria do unemployed younger baby boom women use to evaluate or define vocational alternatives?</td>
<td>Trait and factor theories (various), Social cognitive career theory, Happenstance learning theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The theory-driven subsidiary questions supported the foundational central research question. After establishing the phenomenological focus of the research, through the central question, this researcher cautiously probed for the themes if the women expressed experiencing the phenomena in that manner.
**Conceptual framework as hierarchy.** In the final stage of the research, the data are analyzed and interpreted. The analysis steps of IPA generate a hierarchy of themes that emerge from the recursive analysis of the transcripts. Initial understanding begins in a general manner. Gilligan’s (1982) application of inner voice stipulates the connection of unconscious messages to meaningful understanding of female identity. Specifically, interpreting the transcripts to understand meaningful elements related to development suited the purpose of the present inquiry. Similarly, the recognition of subjective knowledge as epistemology of women (Belenky et al., 1986) supported the analysis plan to consider the content, linguistic, and conceptual levels of understanding the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). The type of analysis specific to IPA afforded the researcher the possibility to consider the themes as evidence of the career counseling theories: Gottfredson’s (1981) theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation; Super’s (1957) life-span, life-space theory; Lent et al.’s (2000) social cognitive-career theory (SCCT); and Krumboltz’s (2009) happenstance learning theory. The analysis plan provides a macro and micro appreciation of the theoretical foundations. Further information about the analysis plan is outlined after explication of data collection.

**Data Collection Instruments**

The present study utilized three data collection instruments: a demographic form to complete prior to the interview, a career lifeline, and a semi-structured interview protocol. First names were collected to sort and code the responses to use for verification of the transcript, but each participant was also assigned a neutral identifier (i.e., pseudonym) for subsequent published work. Once the research participant approved the final transcription of the interview, the neutral identifier replaced the participant’s name. The original interview files are stored in a password protected computer, locked in a private office at the researcher’s home. The files will be stored
for three years then destroyed, utilizing a method approved to maintain confidentiality of the research participants.

**Demographic survey.** Demographic questions included confirmation of the birth year, length of current unemployment in months, and race/ethnicity. A multiple choice question with fill-in collected the highest level of education completed: General Education Diploma (GED) date or graduation date, number of years completed post-secondary education, and identification of certificates, diplomas, or degrees earned with the date. Additional relevant demographic information included the number of dependents in the household and the marital status of the research participant. The demographic data provided descriptive statistics. The demographic variables have been significant in previous studies of career decision making and added to the rich detail of the interpretation. The literature review suggests nomothetic explanation between socioeconomic status and career decision making (Whitmarsh & Wentworth, 2012), among others. Qualitative research is regarded more idiographic, which may be apparent from the interpretation of the transcripts.

To be eligible for the study, women must be born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964. The distribution of the birth year and race/ethnicity provided descriptive information about the sample. The younger baby boom generation is not a homogeneous group (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006; Stewart & Torges, 2006). Understanding and interpreting the themes of the interviews included gathering the demographics that influence the experience of generational factors and career decision making.

**Career lifeline.** Each participant chose where to begin her career lifeline based on the subjective identification of having a “career” including career(s) up to the present time. For the purposes of the research, career is defined as a series of “occupations in the life of an individual”
(Super, 1957). Each research participant plotted the career and life course including particular choice points in the career. At each choice point, the research participant was asked to remember thoughts, assumptions, feelings, and the transition that accompanied the decision point. The aim of the lifeline was to support each participant’s self-reflection prior to the interview and to prime her thinking about previous career decisions. The lifeline encouraged the research participant’s introspection about the past career decisions in order to build rapport with the interviewer expeditiously. Amundson et al. (2010) used a similar instrument to record the previous history of career changes for individuals in their qualitative career decision making study. The career lifeline remained the property of the research participant. The interview captured the result of the career lifeline and eliminated the need to collect a written copy.

**Interview protocol.** Research participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews with an interview protocol listing a number of predetermined questions and probes. The researcher was free to use the probes to explore for thick descriptions or explain a term like *career* based on the research participant’s vocabulary (Berg, 2007). Smith et al. (2009) suggest particular tips for phenomenological focus interviews. For example, the researcher may need to focus the research participant on personal experiences and thoughts and avoid straying into narratives about friends or other people who have the same issue. Interviewers also need to remind individuals they are speaking for themselves; they are not being interviewed to represent a community. Sample interview protocol questions are provided in the subsection to follow.

Prior to beginning the interview questions, the researcher began with a few questions to facilitate rapport and earn the respect of the research participant. The first request was for information about the career lifeline and the choice points. The participant described earlier career choice points, including the thoughts, feeling, intuition, and related events that occurred
during the decision making. Key questions were open ended and emphasized rapport building. When the participant hesitated, the researcher used a number of prompts, such as: “remember a time when you were younger and decided to do something about your career,” and “what was the occasion, age, and what were the thoughts, intuition or ‘gut reaction’ that went along with seeking that career?” The point here was to begin with a story or narrative about the self and the related thoughts that were recalled with the memory. The interview questions were intentional for the purpose of understanding context of previous career decision-making experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

*Sample interview protocol questions.* The research questions and a set of corresponding sample interview questions (see Appendix A for complete individual interview protocol) are listed. The interview protocol was first pilot tested on friends of the researcher who matched the sample characteristics in order to test the vocabulary and flow of the interview.

1. How do the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of unemployed younger baby boom women affect their career decision-making experience?
   - How do your thoughts, assumptions, and opinions affect your career decision-making experience?
   - First, what is it like to be making career decisions while you are unemployed?
   - Does it matter that you are in the younger baby boom generation making a career decision?
   - If yes, (it does matter), how does being in the younger baby boom generation affect your thinking (assumptions, and opinions)?

2. How do the bioecological spheres of human development affect the career decision-making experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women?
• What does it mean to you to be unemployed at this particular point in your life?
• Can you recall the thoughts you have had about the economic conditions and the way those thoughts affect your career decision?

3. How does the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood affect the career decision-making experience of younger baby boom women?
• Would you say that you have ever thought about who you are based on your career?
• Does your career create any thoughts about who you are within the community?

4. How does womanhood affect the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women?
• Specifically, how does being female affect your career decision-making experience?
• What thoughts do you have that you would attribute to being female?
• What assumptions do you have that you think reflect to being female?
• What opinions do you have that you think reflect being female?

5. What criteria do unemployed younger baby boom women use to evaluate or define vocational alternatives?
• Does it matter that you are in the younger baby boom generation making a career decision?
• Do you think intuition plays a role in your career decision? How?
• What about chance? How?
• What about other people’s opinions? If so, whose? Why?
**Researcher as instrument.** Phenomenological studies consider the role of the researcher. The researcher determines the questions to ask and participates in the interview as a source of data collection. The relationship of researcher to data is summed up by the phrase “we can never step out of the world and view it from some detached vista” (van Manen, 2014, p. 62). By guiding participant experience, the researcher is an instrument in the research.

The phenomenological researcher adopts a reflexive attitude in order to avoid an erroneous report. Berger (2015) defines reflexivity as:

> turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one’s own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation (p.220).

In order to understand the participants as uniquely human, the researcher must reflect on and record her own personal experience.

Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that the researcher reflect on whether she might have influenced the interview in any way that would alter the participants’ actual dialogue. Qualitative researchers build rapport and weigh setting boundaries to limit their influence on the interview. Prior to beginning the interviews, the researcher consulted professional resources as an aid to conducting qualitative interviews. One resource suggested that researchers decide how much self-disclosure would be appropriate to build rapport (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liampunthong, 2007). The researcher realized that a participant could become a student at her place of employment, so the level of disclosure was sufficient to gain trust. The participants were all informed of the researcher’s intent and the purpose of the study.
**Researcher reflection.** The researcher has been a career counselor for 25 years. During that time, work with female heads of households illuminated the special experiences and circumstances of women making career decisions. As a career counselor at a community college, there was continual exposure to the narratives of women making career decisions. The research question was a natural extension of the desire to better understand the experience of the younger baby boom population.

The research question and the subsidiary questions explored multiple facets of the career decision-making experience. Women tend to earn less than males (Hegewisch & Williams, 2013), gravitate toward fields that are traditionally female (Coogan & Chen, 2007), and make career decisions based on relational factors (Thorndike, 1911). The researcher identified those facts in her own career, but this circumstance was not the primary motivation for this study. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that qualitative research provide an understanding of what the experience was like. The researcher recognized a need to understand the career decision-making experience for a sector of the population during a period of socioeconomic change.

The intersubjective nature of the study presents the researcher and the participant an opportunity to create a descriptive narrative of the experience (van Manen, 1990). Once the phenomenon is explicated, the researcher, the participant, and eventually the reader of the study recognize their understanding of the phenomenon. This final recognition is one method of validation of the study (van Manen, 1990). The primary attention of the researcher was to contribute an objective report about career decisions made by unemployed women of the younger baby boom generation.
Participant Selection

The target population of the present inquiry was purposively selected to consist of unemployed females born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964. It is important to note here that birth years were identified to avoid confusion over the generational title. Purposive sampling is consistent with the idiographic nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). In addition, the sample was meant to be fairly homogenous, focusing on only those women who were in one geographical location. This decision was carefully considered. During the process of the IRB application, sample recruitment was limited to a geographical area. Limiting a sample to certain types of participants is common in qualitative studies (Babbie, 2010).

The participants were selected from one geographical area, specifically a rural county in southwestern Pennsylvania. This area was selected using census data from 2010. In 2010, the female population between 45 to 49 years of age was 4.1% and 50 to 54 years of age was 4.4% of the total county population. There are more females of that age group (45 to 54) than in any other single age group of females. Overall, females are 51.8% of the county population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). At the time of data collection, the women were between 51 and 60 years of age.

Sampling Method and Sample Size

Research participants were recruited using the researcher’s professional connection with a Western Pennsylvania workforce development nonprofit organization. The users of the organization and its related programs are seeking employment or related services such as workforce training. At an early stage, the Executive Director and the staff were skeptical that within four months a sufficient population would respond to the flyers. Snowball sampling was also ruled out because the staff did not want to decide who met the age demographic. It could be
awkward to think someone were between 50 and 60, and find that they were not. They suggested extending the recruitment and provided additional services and locations for posting the flyers. During this meeting, the gatekeepers also provided useful information about advantages and disadvantages of offering a token incentive for participation. A gift card to a local grocery store/gas station was selected for the gift card token. Since the IRB application was still a draft, the sampling procedure was revised.

Smith et al. (2009) cautioned that sample selection recruitment is an iterative process. Based on the gatekeeper’s recommendation, community centers, libraries, and churches in the geographical region were added to the IRB application. Due to the nature of economic fluctuation and job market, data collection was marginally time sensitive. The researcher proposed to interview between 8 to 12 women. The sample size is stated as a range to indicate the top range of what may be considered ideal, and the lower range that represents what is practical (Robinson, 2014).

**Recruitment of subjects.** The researcher provided recruitment flyers and letters (Appendix B) to the workforce development organization as well as community centers, libraries, and churches. The flyer included participant requirements and information about the gift card incentive for a local grocery store. Interested participants contacted the researcher by phone or by email if they met the selection criteria of the study. The researcher replied in order to discuss the purpose of the study, review of the requirements, and to confirm a time for an interview. Screening questions were prepared to ensure that the potential participant met the criteria for the present inquiry.

**Data collection.** Individual interviews with each research participant explored the in-depth understanding and experience of unemployed younger baby boom women making career
decisions. IPA has a primary concern with cognition and the flow of consciousness (Smith et al., 2009). This portion of the research design explains the data collection methods.

Individual interviews were conducted at a private location in a library near the workforce development office, or another mutually agreeable private location. On the day of the individual interview, the researcher reviewed the consent form (Appendix C) and the participants’ rights which included the right to withdraw. Once a signature was obtained on the consent form, the researcher began the interview with review of the demographic information (Appendix D) and explanation of the career lifeline (Appendix E). The interview continued with reflection generated by the career lifeline (Appendix E). Next the researcher followed the semi-structured interview protocol for the individual interview (Appendix A). The tone was friendly, but not overly influencing or risking bias by the interviewer. The individual interview took between 45-60 minutes each.

The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The researcher recorded notes to supplement the audio data of the recorder, especially if some important detail was not noticeable on the recording. Notes were coded with neutral identifiers; the original names were not on researcher notes. After the interview, the individual participant was consulted on the final transcription to allow correction of the transcript or further refinement of answers to the interview questions. The de-identified results from the interviews will be made available to the Executive Director of the workforce development nonprofit organization.

Analysis

Smith et al. (2009) provides a guiding framework for analysis of data collected using IPA. The framework represents the iterative, interpretive, and subjective elements of the analysis. IPA is concerned with the lived experience of the subject and the researcher’s
interpretation of the dialogue, also known as the “double hermeneutic” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35). Although there is a certain progression outlined for analysis, the goal of data analysis is the development of framework that connects the various themes in the interpretive account (Smith, 2007).

**Data analysis steps.** The outline of analysis assured an orderly approach to analysis. After completing the first interview and transcription, the first account was prepared for analysis. Steps one through four occur with each account individually prior to step five. Each step of the process is described and summarized (Smith et al., 2009).

**Step 1: Reading and re-reading.** At this step, the researcher slowed down. The purpose was to focus, contemplate the transcript and the related recording as a notable artifact. The researcher relived the rapport created with the participant. The immersion in the interview led to appreciation of the general and specific as it evolved in the interview process.

**Step 2: Initial noting.** The researcher continued to be open minded and intentional in comprehension of the research participant’s experience. Using a transcript with ample margins, the next task was to make three types of notes. First, the researcher focused on content to note descriptive details. Second, the researcher focused on the actual language of the participant and recorded linguistic notes. The third set of notes focused on interaction with the transcript, as if in a conversation. The third set of notes questioned and summarized the concepts. The hermeneutic circle functioned at this step. The researcher scrutinized words or paragraphs in order to distinguish important or notable portions.

**Step 3: Developing emergent themes.** The transcript faded to the background as the researcher emphasized the analysis of the parts and how those parts related to themes. Hermeneutics again played a role in the task of sorting themes, both at the micro and macro
levels. The themes reflected the “psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 92). Themes reflected interpretation of parts as well as the whole which reflects the hermeneutic circle and interpretation.

**Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes.** This step involved moving the themes around and noting those themes that connected to the research question. The data were grouped and regrouped; levels formed to indicate a hierarchy. Possible options for identifying connections are further described in the discussion of the findings (Chapter 5). A purpose of this step was innovating and exploring new options for connecting the narrative to the research question.

**Step 5: Moving to the next account.** The research study represented multiple accounts; each account merited its own interpretation and individual understanding of the lived experience. By carefully retracing the steps one through four, the researcher was true to the original analysis. New themes emerged. The purpose was to recognize the individual contribution of each account to the complete understanding of the research question.

**Step 6: Looking for patterns across accounts.** At this step the researcher created a master table by looking for patterns across and between accounts. The researcher also noted significant themes that were an anomaly. The table served to locate the hierarchy of themes between the accounts. The visual representation identified a hierarchy of themes that were most relevant through least relevant to the conceptual framework of the research study. This table was the foundation for the write up of the results in chapter 4. The table summarizes the textural and structural themes derived from the initial findings. To complete the hermeneutic analysis, the
themes are further analyzed in the discussion of Chapter 5 to explicate themes relative to the conceptual framework.

**Ethical Considerations**

Research that focuses on interactions with human subjects is guided by ethical considerations. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Duquesne University adheres to the ethical principles and guidelines for human subject research in the Belmont Report. The principles are beneficence, respect for human dignity, and justice. An application to the IRB requires the researcher to plan for ethical guidelines in order to be approved. An expedited review was requested due to minimal risk posed to the subjects. The type of risk of concern to the IRB addressed the storage and publication of data, and social or psychological risk (Goodfellow, 2015). The research protocol summary delineated procedures and concerns in four specific areas: treatment of subject participants, confidentiality, data storage and retention, and reporting of findings.

**Treatment of Subject Participants**

All participants were deemed cognitively aware to consent to participation in the study. Flyers and screening information offered complete details of the purpose of the study, the time commitment for the data collection, the location for the data collection, and the end result of the analysis of the data. All participants received a written consent form that was also reviewed verbally prior to signatures.

The participants were informed of the right to withdraw. The participants were under no obligation to participate in the study and were free to withdraw consent to participate at any time by contacting the researcher. The participant’s responses would be destroyed and not used in the study. The consent form is Appendix C.
The researcher was aware that the discussion of unemployment may bring up some uncomfortable thoughts or feelings; however such discomfort would be expected to be no greater than would occur in the course of normal conversation. To mitigate possible negative feelings, the last portion of the interview protocol redirected mood through positive affirmation and guided imagery (Mayer, Allen, & Beauregard, 1995). The researcher provided county career and personal counseling referrals.

**Confidentiality.** Each participant was assigned a study code to mask participant names on the data collection instruments. After the consent form was signed, a unique study code was given to each participant to insert on the data collection instrument. The same assigned study code was used to label audiotapes and the transcription. A data collection matrix provided a means for locating and identifying information for this study while ensuring the data themselves remain deidentified (Creswell, 2013). The data collection matrix will be stored in a separate locked location in the researcher’s office.

The researcher assured confidentiality at the beginning of individual interviews, with reminders sporadically throughout. Audiotaping was part of this research, which can identify participants by voice. Only the researcher has access to original written and taped materials. During the data analysis, notes from the audiotapes were transferred to the interview transcriptions. At that point all audiotapes were deleted from the recording device and computer.

**Data storage and retention.** All written materials and consent forms collected during this research study are stored (separated from the data collection matrix) in a locked file or under password protected computer files in the researcher's home. All identifying information was removed from transcribed summaries. All materials will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.
**Reporting of the findings.** The participants were all informed of the reporting method of the data. Names, employers, and any other identifiers were removed from the transcripts and final report. Participants were advised that a summary of the results of the research would be supplied at no cost, upon request.

**Standards of Validation and Evaluation**

Qualitative research adheres to standards for validity or otherwise would lack credibility. The criteria for validity are outlined in a number of academic resources that address qualitative research (e.g., Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) states that some qualitative researchers have no use for validation (e.g. Wolcott, 1990), and others apply quantitative measures. Vagle (2009) argues that there are many different ways to approach validity in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers make validity decisions based on the researcher’s perspective.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers who recognize the application of standards of validation and evaluation prefer the term *trustworthiness* (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1958). Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide four constructs that are useful for qualitative validation. Table 2 provides a cross reference between constructs, clarifies the purpose of the construct, and describes the technique to achieve the construct.

Table 2 on the following page.
Table 2

Cross Reference Validity and Reliability Constructs, Purpose, and Technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Confidence that the research measured what was intended</td>
<td>Prolonged engagement in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Persistent observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peer debriefing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative case analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External validity</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>Findings can be generalized outside of the research environment</td>
<td>Thick description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Independent observations provide the same results</td>
<td>Peer debriefing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Avoid researcher bias</td>
<td>Audit trail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Creswell (2013) and Cohen & Crabtree (2006).

Vagle (2009) suggests that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability have a place in evaluation of phenomenological research. However, the argument for a uniform standard applied to phenomenological research is still debatable (Vagle, 2009). Using the recommendations of various authors (e.g. Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1958; Shenton, 2004; Vagle, 2009; van Manen, 2014), the present study was concerned with trustworthiness and employed the techniques outlined in Figure 1 to demonstrate trustworthiness.

Credibility. Concerning validity, Vagle (2009) confirms a difference between phenomenological researchers and other quantitative researchers. Phenomenological researchers seek to understand an experience. The research purpose is not to understand a “factual empirical but the existential empirical meaning structures of a certain phenomenon or event” (van Manen, 2014, p. 348).
**Prolonged engagement and persistent observation.** The preferred way to achieve understanding of an experience is through prolonged engagement with the phenomenon and informants who have the experience (Vagle, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend persistent observation in order to recognize the key details that make a certain experience distinguishable from other experiences. “If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth” (p. 304).

The researcher achieved prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field of career counseling and career decision making. The researcher has 25 years of experience in career counseling. Career decision making is a substantial focus of academic counseling. Potential students and current students sort through the various influences on their career decisions in order to eventually settle on a career goal. The career goal determines the academic plan. The researcher met with generational peers to check for agreement on her observations prior to confirming the research topic.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), involves the researcher proposing the research inquiry to “disinterested peers” in order to shed light on details that only be “implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). The researcher met with the directors of two job training programs to discuss the research questions. Throughout the dissertation proposal process, the researcher also had access to her dissertation chair to discuss and further explore aspects of the research question.

**Negative case analysis.** By definition, negative case analysis serves to confirm characteristics that are essential to recognize an experience. When those criteria are not apparent, the researcher may choose to revisit steps in the data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).
As the researcher collected data and consulted with the dissertation chair, she discussed elements of an interview which were unusual. Instead of broadening the criteria for inclusion in the study, the close scrutiny of this case served to set parameters of what was legitimately an experience relevant to the research question. That participant interview was not included in the data analysis.

**Member checking.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) endorse this technique as a dependable measurement for validity of an account. The benefits of member checking include further engagement with the research participant. The additional clarification corrects errors and allows amplification of important details. Member checking was included in the institutional review board (IRB) protocol.

After the transcripts were prepared, each participant’s was sent to her. The average transcription was completed in one week. Transcription was completed from audio tapes, supplemented by notes written during the interview. Participants were requested to reply in one week to facilitate immediate processing of the transcript. The researcher adopted this timeframe to take advantage of the recent memory for key questions and purpose of the study. The transcripts were returned to the participant with instructions to check for errors, omissions, and to affirm that the statements were the true meaning (Shenton, 2004). Five of the nine participants responded with corrections or amplification of sections. One participant added material to correct perceptions to improve the interpretation.

The interviewee should be able to recognize their account of the experience once the IPA analysis is complete. Lyons (2007) maintains that an IPA researcher interprets the experience without imposing a slant more representative of the researcher’s experience. At the conclusion of the analysis, a summary of the results will be supplied to each participant upon request. No
participants have requested the summary, but the two directors from the job training programs have requested a summary of results.

**Transferability.** Phenomenological researchers aim to describe the experience in sufficient detail to distinguish the uniqueness of a specific experience (Vagle, 2009). Vagle argues that van Manen (1990) intended for hermeneutic phenomenological researchers to be explicit in research. The researcher should not “get side-tracked or wander aimlessly and indulge in wishy-washy speculations . . . .” (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). The type of specificity described by both sources meets the definition of transferability. The analysis and interpretation result in an account that can be identified relative to the environment. The detailed presentation of the interpretation and results suggests how the study can be generalized to another environment (Shenton, 2004). The amount of detail that is suitable for transferability is called *thick description* by qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). By definition, thick description is a detailed portrait of the situation, including the context.

**Thick description.** Thick description was achieved by using Yardley’s criteria (Robinson, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000). Yardley’s criteria focused on elements considered benchmarks for assessing validity of a study: “sensitivity to context, rigor, transparency, coherence, and impact and importance” (Robinson, 2014, p. 38).

The research design was selected with the research question in mind. Specific research design questions were considered and then the data collection conceptualized to provide a thorough picture of the research participants. As the researcher conducted each interview, the participant responded to the sensitivity demonstrated by the researcher. Otherwise, data collection would be incomplete and not meet the criteria for understanding the career decision-
making experience. The final written analysis served as further evidence of careful “sensitivity to context” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180).

Considering that the analysis is interpretive and hermeneutical, the researcher protects the data by carefully interpreting the data. One way to do this is to provide many direct quotes from the data and not allow the researcher’s personal meaning to influence the final analysis by bracketing. This is an example of the sensitivity to context. Bracketing is recognized as an essential step to ensure validity and quality (Creswell, 2013) and also serves the purpose of commitment to validity and transparency in the report.

Transferability is a debatable goal when evaluating qualitative research. This is also the case for IPA. Smith et al. (2009) suggests that the idiographic nature of IPA deems the subject of the study an essential experience. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue in favor of providing sufficient detail so that the reader will determine the appropriateness of transferability.

Working in a reflexive mode, the researcher used questions posed by Polkinghorne (1989) to evaluate thick description in writing the results. The questions were (a) can the final report be traced back to the transcriptions with connections that are credible and logical; (b) is the report so general that it could satisfactorily describe most experiences of career decision making by any population?

**Dependability.** The purpose of dependability applies in a specific way to qualitative research. The researcher interpretation is so distinct, it essentially rules out the notion that two researchers will conduct the same study and replicate the interpretation. The nature of the phenomenon contributes to this as well due to the changing nature of the experience (Shenton, 2004). Lyons (2007) distinguishes the researcher role in IPA analysis:
the researcher can access motives and understandings that the participant is either not aware of or finds difficult to express, whereas discursive approaches do not attribute motives to the participants and do not take their words to reflect experiences that participants may or may not be aware of. (p. 162)

The researcher utilizes his or her frame of reference and understanding of the phenomenon to interpret the experience. The researcher both sets aside his or her own experience and calls upon the knowledge acquired in the field to interpret the data (Lyons, 2007). For this reason, IPA researchers conceptualize dependability as transparency.

Transparency is one of the recommended paths to satisfy dependability (Shenton, 2004). The final report (in this case, the dissertation) should include extensive detail about the research design and implementation. Future readers understand precisely what was done in the field from the data collection information and analysis tables. Finally, the dissertation includes a reflective appraisal of how the study might be improved or further researched (Shenton, 2004).

The dissertation committee of the doctoral candidate performs an internal audit. The purpose of an internal audit is to question and check the accuracy of the dissertation. Important feedback is directed to the researcher in order to develop a scholarly research report. Where there is ambiguity, the dissertation defense promotes clarity in thinking and logic.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is concerned with reducing researcher bias. The researcher strives to separate her personal biases and interpret only the actual accounts of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). This construct is similar to the researcher as instrument. The issue of objectivity is salient, deserving additional attention as a measure of trustworthiness. To establish confirmability, the researcher reported information to provide an audit trail and maintained a reflexive journal.
The audit trail serves a dual purpose of confirmability and dependability by supplying detailed descriptions of the research study. Since the audit trail was introduced in previous paragraphs, the emphasis is on elaborating on the reflexive journal. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend a reflexive journal to document the research process. The journal contains details about environment, location for meetings, and methodological decisions. It is a private document and serves to record ongoing reflection and growing self-awareness.

Polkinghorne (1989) suggests questions to address the confirmability construct. To assess whether the researcher was entirely objective in analysis, the researcher self-reflects on the following questions: Were any alternative descriptions for the results omitted? Were there any alternative ways to understand the transcript? Did the researcher influence the contents of the transcript in any way that would alter the meaning of the participants’ actual experience?

**Summary of trustworthiness.** All researchers are attentive to measures of validity and reliability. The manner that qualitative, and especially phenomenological researchers, depends on their research design and research tradition. Although the measures to check for trustworthiness are not exhaustive, their purpose satisfies essential aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Limitations of the Study**

Researchers acknowledge the potential weaknesses of the study and define the scope of the study. “Part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study” (Glesne, 2006, p. 169). The present inquiry has the following limitations and delimitations.
Limitations

Limitations are the external conditions affecting the study to weaken or limit the appropriate use of the research findings. While conducting background research on the participants, the researcher found demographic data, research findings, and supplemental material did not match the exact age of the research subjects. When possible, the correct data were reported as close to the target population or if the target population met the characteristics. For example, employment charts that recorded a category of over 55 may have been used as the best available data to form a conclusion about the research population (Toossi, 2012).

Generalizability. The qualitative method relies on interpretations of transcripts to understand the subjective meaning of career decision making of younger baby boom women. While the small sample size and limited geographical area provides for the rich detail and in-depth understanding of the research questions, it also limits the generalizability of the findings. All younger baby boom women who are unemployed may not have the same experience as those interviewed in this sample. The results of a qualitative study are intended to be transferable but not generalizable.

Participant and researcher concerns. Another weakness of the study was the relationship of the researcher and participants. The researcher met the demographic criteria to be included in the study. The research participant may have felt that some items would not need to be explained or clarified because the researcher was similar to the research participant. The researcher was stringent about not making value judgments about the participant’s experience. Furthermore, the researcher was careful to avoid assuming certain details that were not relevant to the research participant’s life experience.
The demographic data instrument streamlined the collection of facts such as the number of members in the household. If the topic surfaced during the interview, it was due to the participant’s interest. The self-report process could elicit responses that were consciously or unconsciously censored by the individual to provide answers that the research participant felt was favorable to self or helpful to the researcher. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher attempted to minimize any verbal and nonverbal cues to the research participant. Using the reflexive journal reminded the researcher that the study must reflect the participants’ experiences.

**Delimitations.** The delimitations of the study explicate the boundaries of the study in order to limit the scope of the study. The delimitations are set by the researcher prior to the start of the study. The design and research question are initial decisions made by the researcher to limit the boundaries. The chief variables that were defined included the age, gender, and employment status of the research participants. White’s (1992) definition of generation emphasizes the strict adherence to the birth dates of the research participants. A generation is “a joint interpretive construction which insists upon and builds among tangible cohorts in defining a style recognized from the outside and from within” (White, 1992, p. 31).

The researcher limited the sample by gender and employment status. Careful attention to demographic collection provided safeguards against stereotypical categorization. By creating these categorical limitations, the study findings may be informational and transferable to similar contexts or settings.

**Chapter Summary**

To summarize, this study adds to the research literature on unemployed younger baby boom women as they make career choices. Stead et al. (2010) found that career development
literature predominately emphasizes one type of research question, the type that results in quantitative research. Increasing support of diverse philosophical approaches to research practice in career counseling leads to diversity within the research base and knowledge (Stead et al., 2010).

The present inquiry utilizes a social constructivist worldview. Blustein et al. (2004) states “social constructionist thought generates a critical view of a variety of traditions, questions taken-for-granted knowledge, and shakes the ground under long accepted assumptions of Western culture . . . .” (p. 424). The research question seeks to understand the career decision making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women using novel approaches for career development research.

The aim of the present inquiry seeks to understand a new period within the lifespan created by longevity and better health outcomes for late middle age women (Bateson, 2010). At the same time, cultural and historical events pressure late middle age adults to make career decision differently. For one cohort in particular, unemployed women born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964, the present study provides contemporary insight on the career decision making process. Most generational research is produced by social scientists and business researchers for the purpose of providing nonprofit services or marketing.

While there are a number of theoretical approaches for career counseling, the field tends to gravitate toward environment fit models (Amundson et al., 2010; Dagley & Salter, 2004). Amundson et al. (2010) cites the lack of career decision making research that spotlights the “decider’s subjective experience” and the need for more “relational, contextual, and meaning-based career development theory and practice” (p. 59). IPA examines how individuals make sense of major life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The present exploratory inquiry combines
variables in a new manner to add to the career development research literature for a particular generational cohort.

The purposive sample procedure increases the likelihood that the participants met specific demographic criteria (Berg, 2007). After selection, the research participant completed a career lifeline prior to the individual interviews. A semi-standardized interview protocol provides a consistent format for essential questions (Berg, 2007). After transcription, the research participants had an opportunity to read the transcript to suggest edits for clarity or elaboration. Researcher bias will be bracketed to interpret only the themes relevant to the research participant’s meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The data analysis followed the guidelines for IPA researchers. The multiple steps were completed with each transcript consistent with the hermeneutic circle. The findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, incorporating empathy with the research participant, without compromising accuracy and validity. The idiographic nature of IPA drew attention to the details that impart meaning to the individual experience (Smith, 2009). IPA was ideally suited to study the career decision-making process and the related secondary questions generated by the various career decision-making theories. The final report intends to broaden the understanding of how life span development and career decisions converge for unemployed women who are in their 50s.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The present inquiry concentrated on the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women. The women in this study shared their experiences so that career counselors and service providers would better understand career decision-making by this population. The informants articulated their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions in detail to provide insight on their career decision-making experience when they were unemployed. Their interviews represented changing expectations about work and the lengthening period of time younger baby boom women expect to work prior to retirement.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to interpret the transcripts for this present inquiry. The chapter begins with an explanation of the analysis steps used in IPA. The bracketing of presuppositions follows the analysis steps to assure transparency in the report of the findings. The findings begin with an introduction to the participants of the inquiry. In general, the demographics of the sample are reported and then, specifically, the important contextual information. Each informant provided the contextual information during the career decision-making timeline and reflection.

Following the introduction to the participants, the themes are presented as a cross analysis summary to the central research question and then the subsidiary questions. The goal is to share the results of the data collection in such a way that the themes provide a sense of what the participants experienced (Smith et al., 2009). Ultimately analysis lead to exploration of what it is like to make career decisions as an unemployed woman of the younger baby boom generation.
Data Analysis

IPA data analysis was based on steps outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Each of the eight transcripts was analyzed as a separate unit. This was completed as a series of steps in the same manner for all transcripts. The first two steps consisted of reading and re-reading to make preliminary markings and notes about context, language, or questions that require further reflection. Initially, the reading was completed while listening to the audio recording. It was a slow process. The marking and notes were recorded in the right hand column on the transcript. The file was saved and stored as a Word file.

The next step was to note emergent themes in the left hand column of the transcript. Both micro and macro levels of the themes were noted to be related to the appropriate research question in a later step. At this point, the transcript was read as a whole and as a series of parts. The themes derived from sorting phrases that were descriptive or explanatory. Both types of themes answered the central research question.

The next step concentrated on emerging themes and patterns. Once this step was completed with the first transcript, the four previous steps were repeated with each of the eight transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). As the steps were repeated, themes were either broadened or new themes were created. New themes were checked for frequency and linkages to existing themes. Such was the case with the two participants who were called by God to their career. The two instances were not sufficient to stand alone. The cluster was reorganized and conceptualized to a more suitable grouping that also matched an existing thematic grouping. Tools in the Word file facilitated searching the transcripts for this step.

The final step was to create a table that summarized the participants, the themes, and frequency of the cross analysis (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). That table was used for the
written narrative of the results of the central research question. Additional tables were constructed to sort and clarify the themes related to the four subsidiary questions. Since these were second level understanding of the themes, the findings included only those quotes that were not used in the original research findings or were illustrative of the subsidiary question. This was the case of the career as calling from God. The original quote was in the primary research findings, and the summarization was included in the subsidiary question report. Original quotes which were not reported in the central research question but were significant to the subsidiary question were included verbatim.

**Identifying Presuppositions**

Prior to writing the research text, the researcher separates out personal “preunderstandings, frameworks, and theories regarding the motivation and nature of the question” (van Manen, 2014, p. 224). Called *openness* by van Manen, this type of bracketing or hermeneutic reduction, seeks to overcome “one’s subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations that may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of an experience” (p. 224). The researcher seeks to isolate his or her experience of the phenomenon from the writing of the research text.

Researchers who are oriented to the phenomenological approach acknowledge the philosophical influence of constructivism in their research design. Social constructivism attempts to understand the meaning individuals give to certain experiences (Creswell, 2013). Researchers expect to find a “complexity of views” that generates a pattern of meaning (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Finlay (2011) reminds researchers who are also therapists to practice reflexive acknowledgement of the researcher’s involvement. Any interpretation of data is based on personal understanding of the experience. The lens that is adopted by the researcher may be
very broad and open or narrow and closed. As the researcher, interpretations of the data are subject to that lens. Finlay (2011) guides researchers to “disentangle our perceptions and understandings from the phenomenon being studied” and also “to recognize that interpretation cannot be exorcized from the ongoing revelation of the thing under scrutiny and should probably be acknowledged” (p. 113). The researcher determines how and in what way personal understandings influence the study (Creswell, 2013).

Researcher’s Reflection

Prior to interviewing the women, I reflected on personal feelings about the topic and what might occur during the interviews. A summary of my answers to the interview protocol questions follows:

- I thought that unemployment would make the career decision-making experience stressful and rushed. I thought the job search would halt any career decision-making process. I envisioned that the women who were unemployed for periods over three months would be panicked by the lack of steady income. This may lead to accepting any job opening and not making much of a career decision.

- As an unemployed woman making career decisions, I would have emphasized looking for a job that was in the STEM field. I know that women tend to be underpaid in fields traditionally held by women, so I would expect to see more women look for non-traditional career fields.

- Being in the younger baby boom generation, I believe puts many current unemployed workers in a squeeze. From my personal experience, I cannot move forward in education because the older workers are not retiring as early as previous generations of employees. I am also feeling the push from the younger
generation to have current academic credentials, including counseling licensure which was not available when I completed my Master’s degree when I was 24 years old. My opinion is that because I am in education, I could linger below the older baby boom employees until we both decide to retire.

- The economic conditions of the local labor market are not as promising as the urban area near me. I would most likely seek employment where the job market has a more robust growth potential. I would look for work that is closely related but with an employer that has a strong future in the new economy.

- I think I am very similar to working women of all generations when it comes to thinking about career and identity. It took me a long time to complete my education and career track. I am proud of my accomplishments and think that most women still consider their education a badge of accomplishment. I expect to meet many women who are educated, including career training and employer sponsored development programs that were plentiful in the 1980s.

- I turned down a job offer in business to stay in education because I felt it would give me more flexibility to raise my children. I would not do the same thing again if I were offered a job in business. My intuition and family role would not guide me so completely. Salary and benefits are more important to me now.

- To improve the role of chance, I would be more conscious of networks. I would talk to more people and seek advice about career choices that I did not consider. I would ask other people who knew me, what do you think would be a good career for me? Is there room in your workplace for someone like me?
In addition to clarifying my thoughts on the topic, practice interviews were recorded with three women who met the demographic criteria of the sample. These interviewees did not experience unemployment, but had a recent career transition that prompted their own reflection about career decision-making. Their experiences improved the interview experience for me as I pilot tested the interview protocol. I listened to the audio recordings to become sensitized to my own patterns of speech, my inflections, and any overtones that I might convey during the interview. In addition to using the interview protocol, I created a notecard that held the three main touchpoints to ground the interview. Those touchpoints were unemployment, younger baby boomer woman, and how those factors affected career decision making. After completing these preparation steps, I felt ready to schedule data collection.

As a college counselor I met a number of women who decided to attend college after termination from a job. Sometimes they would share their motivation for attending college, but not all willingly share their experiences. Furthermore, I only met those women who attended college. There was a potential group of women I would never meet. As the job market changes and retirement is delayed, I wanted to better understand how those changes impacted women. I felt uniquely qualified to interview the women of this study.

I learned that it would be unlikely for me to meet women who had recent job loss. All of the potential interviewees who had a recent job loss did not follow up with confirming an interview date. When the women began to contact me, I felt a tremendous amount of gratitude for their participation in the study. The gatekeepers were the real catalyst for this research to be completed. Their confidence in the research engendered confidence to the women who eventually consented to participate. After five months of recruitment, I did interview one woman who recently lost her job.
I benefitted from the fact that all of the women had some curiosity about the research. Each person was entirely honest with me and did not shield her feelings or dodge any of my questions. Their enthusiasm for the research spurred my drive. I felt I found an area that was not fully understood in the counseling profession. The women wanted to participate to improve other’s understanding of their experience. Linda was succinct: “I’m not hiding anything because I think if you can help other people through a challenging period of time, why hide it.”

In addition to the honest and comprehensive participation in the interviews, the women demonstrated resilience and optimism for the future. The acceptance of their life and career circumstances educated me on how I might be able to face challenges in my own personal life. I have the luxury of employment security but have wondered how my career may develop in the next 10 years. Career transition and re-training are more tangible. I felt a connection with the women since I am completing my Ph.D. in my late-50s.

During the interviews I had to be careful to separate myself from the individual. If I were to influence the interview in any way, I would create a flawed report. As it turned out, listening and interviewing was not so challenging. Each woman had her own story to tell, it was not my story. As each interview was completed, I began to be reassured by noticing themes that were consistent. I noticed that while individuals were unique, the generational influence did surface. I heard saturation of themes in the interviews. My journaling pinpointed themes as I recognized common elements prior to analysis.

**Presuppositions.** Presuppositions outline previous understandings and identify any investment in particular research outcomes. The following presuppositions were anchored in the interview protocol and analysis of themes of the participants’ experiences:
• Career decision-making occurred through the process of weighing thoughts, assumptions, and opinions.

• The researcher anticipated that the career decision-making experience would rely on the participant recognizing her own thoughts, assumptions, and opinions.

• Each participant would emphasize aspects of the career decision-making process central to her own perspective.

Summary of Participants

Nine women born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964 were interviewed for the present inquiry. The purposive sampling procedure drew participants primarily from four sources. At the time of the interview, three women were completing job skills training, three were regularly networking with a nonprofit employment service, two read the posted flyer in a community library, and one heard of the study at a church community dinner.

At the initial meeting with the participant, the researcher reviewed the consent form including the right to withdraw, and voluntary consent to participate in the research project. Each participant was assigned a participant number that was used consistently on the data collection instruments and as transcript labels. The participant number has been replaced with a pseudonym assigned from the top female names used in the 1960s (Social Security, 2016). This step increases the readability of the results and assures the confidentiality of the participant.

Unemployment as a Variable

Before beginning the interview, each woman answered a screening question about unemployment and length of time for the current period of unemployment. Since the research question seeks to understand career decision making of unemployed younger baby boom women, the experience of unemployment was a necessary variable to be included in the results. More
than half of the participants were able to answer the question of unemployment very directly based on the operational definition. At the time of the interview, six of the nine women were not working at all. Later in the interview, the researcher learned that those six women had financial resources that included a severance/retirement package from their last employer, or were not the head of household, or were drawing income from investments.

The remaining three of the nine women had a more subjective understanding of unemployment. While completing the demographic survey their subjective understanding was explored to better understand if the experience qualified for inclusion in the study. The women were similar; even though they were working, each person considered herself unemployed. By further probing for clarification of identification of unemployment, individuals added their modifications to the operational definition of unemployment. The additional criteria to determine unemployment included lack of steady employment; lack of benefits, especially health insurance; lack of connection to professional training or responsibility; and payment of wages as unreported income (i.e., “under the table”).

**Removing one interview from the sample.** After reviewing the interview transcripts and criteria for inclusion in the study, one interview was removed from the analysis. The woman was unemployed but due to disability. Medically she was unable to return to work and her decision-making experience did not concern a career. The interview was a non-example of career decision making. This chapter reports the findings from the remaining eight \((N=8)\) interviews.

**Demographic Summary of Participants**

The eight women reported their duration of current unemployment. The range of unemployment period was 3.5 weeks up to 15 years. Two of the women were unemployed for
periods that were extremely short (3.5 weeks) or long (15 years). After removing the two outliers, the mean period of unemployment of the remaining six participants was 10.8 months.

All of the women graduated from high school. After high school, six of the eight graduated from a community college, college, university or technical school. Of those six women, one has gone on to graduate from a graduate-level program. At the time of the interview, four of the eight women were in a community college program; one of the eight women was enrolled in a college or university.

None of the women lived alone as head of household. The majority were living with another person (mode = 2). Two reported being the head of the household. The remaining demographic information collected from the sample is included in Table 3. Table 3 on the following page.
Table 3

**Demographic Information of Female Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Length of unemployment</th>
<th>Post-Secondary Education Graduatea</th>
<th>Current enrollment</th>
<th>Household size (including participant)</th>
<th>Head of household</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>3.5 weeks</td>
<td>Yes Bachelor</td>
<td>2 year community college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 year community college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>Yes Masters</td>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Yes Bachelor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Yes Bachelor</td>
<td>2 year community college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 year community college</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Yes Vocational Diploma</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Yes Vocational Diploma</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All graduated from high school.

*a*Technical school, 2 year community college, 4 year college or university

The demographic questionnaire did not collect marital status and number of children.

That information was discussed in the interviews if the participant described it as part of the career decision-making experience. The following summary of each participant includes family history as well as employment history that the participant felt was relevant to the career decision-making experience. In the opening of the interview, the participants shared the story that wove through the decision-making experiences prior to the present period of unemployment. The key
Donna. Donna began work at an early age. She remembers that work was always encouraged as a way to do well. Her father urged all his children to attend college. Donna decided to attend a state university. Money was not available to attend straight through, so Donna held jobs while attending the university. She attributes the lack of funds to “being from an African American family.” It took a bit longer but she eventually graduated with a degree in Business Administration. She wanted a job in personnel administration. To sum up, Donna felt that the experience of working and paying for the university education taught her responsibility. She emphasized “responsibility.” Her father succeeded in teaching his children responsibility.

The first job was hard to get, even when she looked within Pennsylvania and out of state. After looking for and not obtaining a job in personnel administration, she took a job in an unrelated field. The job required analytical skills and responsibility for facility management. She worked with many different people from corporations as well as people from the non-profit sector. The job lasted a while but then an opening came up to work in personnel administration in a southern state. It was the right opportunity to begin to work in her field of training.

Donna took a job placing people in jobs. Her clients would request certain qualifications and she would find the applicants that matched the open position. At one time there was a client who told her that he would not hire Blacks. “I wondered, did he look at me? Why is he telling me this?” She related this story without anger, even laughed a bit about the irony of the situation. Some employers were openly prejudiced. She quit this job due to the death of her brother. She then moved back to her home in Pennsylvania.
The event of her brother’s death was significant in two ways. First, it was the precipitating event to quitting the job in personnel administration. Second, she went to a therapist to recover from the sadness of losing her brother. The therapist advised her to find a job that wasn’t stressful and something that was different from her previous work: “totally the opposite of what I was doing in my field.” Donna took a job that required physical labor and it helped. “It was a different environment, no stress, and the physical labor allowed me to work through the anxiety.” She continued to work at this same company for the remainder of her career.

Donna was never able to bid into a job in human resources for the company. A policy prohibited a person to work in human resources if other family members worked for the company. She rose to a high level of responsibility within the company. Every day her department communicated to all other departments and externally to agencies about the state of the business. After a long career history, her job was eliminated because the business was sold and closed in this area. Her tone revealed the pride she had in her work and level of responsibility with the company. Donna knew she would lose her job for several months before the business closed locally. She was unemployed for less than a month prior to this interview. Donna had a difficult time fitting in time for her interview and rescheduled a few times due to the number of appointments she had for her personal transitioning to unemployed status and due to the increasing responsibility she assumed for her parents’ healthcare.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly graduated from high school with a diploma and a certificate from her local college. The college offered high school seniors data processing training on Saturdays and an internship. “It was a lot of entering data. I then started working at a large retail store in the mall. My dad suggested it and I liked what I did because I was with people; helping and
serving.” She worked there 38 years before she retired. Kimberly believes her dad helped her to find this job because it matched her personality.

My dad knew I was a people person. I worked diligently at the church and he knew I was good with people. He said, “this will be a good place for you, the type of person you are”. He took me there to apply for the job. My father definitely didn’t want any of his daughters in a mill. That was his one thing; he never asked me anything else. He didn’t want any of his kids working (in the mill), not even as a secretary. He did not want me in a mill.

Kimberly said that her father told her that steel millwork was not for women. He was also worried about “all that stuff” going into the lungs. She agreed with his decision. She was spared the problems that millworkers now have with their lungs.

Kimberly is proud of her father—“I love my Dad!” she said emphatically. And her father gave her an education about how women were to behave in the work environment. “He didn’t want me to be around the guys, the way they spoke . . . he wanted me to be a respectable woman.” She was not to hang out with the guys at a workplace. Since socializing was an important part of being accepted in the workplace, her father preferred she work at a place that would have more interactions with women. He told her to find a job that would suit her. She did find the job that she loved. Her job provided a lot of interaction with the public. She had a long career and only took a retirement offer when it was apparent there was no other job left that she would consider.

Kimberly’s career had longevity. She trained many new and younger employees but she never took a promotion to management. She was offered to be in management several times but that would have conflicted with her belief in being in church on Sunday. Managers were not
able to decline work on Sunday. She also thought it was important to be able to take off on a weekend to have time for weekend visitors or a vacation. If someone would call off, the managers had to be prepared to step in and give up their vacation. She was head lead in her department but never applied for more than that.

Kimberly’s work philosophies guided her through her long successful tenure. She navigated the intricacies of department managers and knew how to manage her work load. “I knew enough not to take on so much. Because when you are too nice, people take advantage of your niceness. So you live and learn.”

Some of the lessons involved how women were perceived at work. She felt that some managers would use her, but she was able to use them back. This is said with a note of amusement in her tone. “Because I am a woman too—I don’t do favors, never do favors. I do my job. If this is my job description, I will do it but if it’s not, well, I won’t do personal things. Ask me to do my job and I will do it.”

Her last bit of work advice reminded her of something her dad taught her. Kimberly called it being “decent.” This means that you go to work, do the job, and then go home. She also learned that women’s jobs were different than a man’s job. If the manager wanted something heavy lifted, she would get the department responsible for moving and lifting to do the job. But this did not become a problem with her managers because she learned to respect people. She would get the job done and described herself as “bossy.” She added, “when I talk to you, you don’t want to say no to me.” And again she laughed at her description of her work attitude. When Kimberly retired from her company, she felt she had been a great employee, worked hard, and treated customers and fellow workers with respect.
At the time of the interview, Kimberly and her younger sister were in a program to learn advanced computer skills and would be looking for employment in the future. She was unemployed 12 months when we met.

**Linda.** Linda began her career lifeline with her “first real job,” the job that led to her career in nursing. At 18 she was able to work as a nursing assistant. Eventually she graduated and worked as a registered nurse. Due to personal interests in “helping other individuals,” she gravitated to the responsibilities of patient teaching. From there she began working as a clinical instructor for student nurses. When a full time position opened, she applied and accepted. “I loved helping students and I thought I had the best of both worlds: being in education as well as the clinical areas.” She also accepted other responsibilities that eventually led to a leadership position in nursing education. “I was happy as a registered nurse. I was happy as a faculty member. I loved the creativity of teaching.” This career lasted over 30 years, with overlapping positions and experiences.

Linda confided that she did not graduate from nursing school with the goal to move to nursing education. “I certainly had an interest in all of those basic elements.” The basic elements she refers to are the teaching skills used with patient education. Her career just seemed to grow in a “natural” progression. She encouraged continuing education for herself and others as well. As part of her own continuing education, she considered a doctorate program.

After treatment for breast cancer, her employer changed their academic offerings and she lost her job. While on severance from that job, she committed to a doctorate program. Deciding to apply for and then accept an offer of admission began her next phase of her career. She wants to combine her previous 30 year career with a future in educational leadership or teaching. Her research interest involves distance learning and adults.
Lisa. Lisa graduated with a degree in health education. During the final semester, Lisa completed her student teaching. Her supervisor was a “wonderful lady” who was very late in her teaching career; she thought she must have been in her 70s. “She didn’t respect the students anymore and they didn’t respect her.” This experience squashed any desire Lisa had to enter the field.

The reality of the teaching environment was also discouraging. “It was 1981 and they were using textbooks from 1969. So if you can imagine how much things had changed in health education from 1969 to 1981.” She goes on to say, “I was thinking to myself, you know these 10th and 11th graders knew all of the answers. And what am I going to do, what am I able to teach these kids?” She also found that the salaries were low, very low, “around $12 or $13,000.”

Lisa described her early career as a route or road. She decided to work with mentally and physically handicapped people in Maryland. She read about a supervisor’s job in the *Washington Post* and moved to take the job. At this point of the interview, she was happy and animated. The narrative flowed easily and she was proud of her work. This was also at the same time she met her husband. They moved back to Pennsylvania and she continued to work with physically and mentally handicapped people. She held supervisory positions and eventually was a director of a home health agency.

Reflecting on this career transition, Lisa disclosed that she is “a caregiver, not a business person.” Lisa takes responsibility for making bad financial decisions for the agency. “I think that was a defining moment for me. I was my own boss. I was on boards. I was kind of on the pedestal and I kind of flopped off. The agency was my baby for 6 ½ years and it was really hard.” Her voice and demeanor showed disappointment with that period of time. Lisa continued to work but for someone else. She was used to making the decisions, but in the new job “even
for simple things, I have to go and ask. It was a real hit to the ego.” Lisa has consistently worked in the human service field, but funding of services and contract renewals interrupted her years of service. She has made some agency changes due to promotions but there were instances of lack of funding for a program.

At this point, Lisa explained the impact of the career transition on her ego. She described her family as hard workers. Her father was an editor of a local paper and “well thought of.” He made decisions at a high level and so did her mother. Lisa’s mother was an executive secretary. It was easy to discern the pride in her voice. In Lisa’s words, “work ethic was extremely important.”

Now she works at homecare positions for brief periods. While she values the work, the work is “below my skill level but it is an easy job to get and I needed something quickly.” Because the employment is not steady, and she is basically “helping out a friend”, she considers herself unemployed. She had no clients or work at the time of the interview.

Lisa was getting licensed as a minister. She would consider work as a chaplain but learned that she would need to have a Masters of Divinity. The cost of additional education was on her mind but she “always loved to learn.” Once she was licensed, she would have to go to the seminary and get ordained. At that point the Masters would be conferred.

Mary. Mary completed a college degree in fashion merchandising. She was able to use her training in part time jobs but her full time job was homemaker. She kept the family running, managing the day to day business and caregiving needs of her family. Her husband was able to devote his attention to his career because she attended to the family. Later, she supported the family retail business. She always put her family first. She had jobs and had good reviews but wouldn’t call it a career.
To call something a career, Mary felt that the work was “doing what I had gone to school for.” For a period of time she owned and managed a retail store with her husband. This experience used her college education and was valued as something more than a job.

Mary considers herself underemployed because she works a minimal amount of hours and is involved in retraining to improve her position and skills. She left retail employment and management due to the physical challenges and amount of hours required to perform the job. Even with her current career plans, she wants to be available to her grandchildren at this time in her life.

Michelle. Michelle graduated from high school, attended college for three years, and then began working. She was not sure what she would do at that point. On a friend’s referral, she took a job working at a company that took care of mentally retarded adults. She worked there for 10 years. Her tenure at the company was interrupted by a year when she took time off after the birth of her second child. She quit the job to provide home schooling for her children. “I needed to be home, and I didn’t like working outside the home. I didn’t like leaving my children so I quit work at that time. Financially, we were able to.” She has not worked since the early 2000’s.

Exploring the decision a little bit further, Michelle emphasized that she liked the work but did not like leaving her children. It was difficult to leave the job. She had the same group of mentally retarded women for her 10 years with the company. When the children were young, she worked on the weekend so her husband could provide the childcare but they both decided their stress could be avoided. “When I had the opportunity, financially, not to have to work anymore, I chose that and my husband supported me in that.” They made some financial arrangements to eliminate debts and she has stayed home for 15 years. Her job was homemaker
and teacher for her home-schooled children. With the children grown, Michelle now feels that God has called her to work in the healthcare field. She has now attended a training program to transition to the new field in the future.

**Patricia.** Patricia began working before she was 16 because the family owned stores where she would stock shelves and be busy. At 14 years of age, she sold Avon with some help from her mother. She was good at finding jobs in her neighborhood and would pick up a job to have her own spending money or gas money. She was driven to work by her energy, love of work, and need to help people. She would take jobs near home so she could get to work without asking for a ride. During her late teens, she began to get really interested in fitness. This lead to jobs at fitness places as well as work as a life-guard and swimming instructor.

Even though she had brothers and sisters who could have worked, Patricia was the one who could be counted on to work enthusiastically. “My brothers worked in the stores but I wanted to do it. I was the one at home that did all of the work. I was a go-getter.” One career that interested Patricia was cosmetology. By the time she entered cosmetology school at 19, she had been doing shampoo work at an aunt’s shop for three years.

Patricia did graduate from high school. She liked school but did not excel at it. Her father was a “typical Italian father. If we went to college we would just quit and then we would have wasted our time. We would just get married.” He would not pay for college for his daughters so Patricia paid for it herself. She paid for cosmetology school with her part-time jobs and graduated.

Patricia did work for a couple of salons and found that she “hated” the work. “It was a big disappointment for me because I wanted to do it all of my life. And I really tried. That was a
setback for me because I pumped myself up for so many years to do it.” She did work on the side from her home. She was about 21 years old at the time.

At this point, she had her first gynecological exam and they found a “huge” tumor. This event had an enormous impact because surgery was required on her 21st birthday. She wasn’t married, still lived at home, and had no healthcare coverage. She went on Medicaid for a while. In the end, her uterus was pretty badly scarred from the surgery but she avoided a hysterectomy.

In the following year, Patricia did move out to her own apartment and continued to work at a variety of jobs. The string of jobs included grocery store work, running a jewelry department in a retail store, and restaurant food server. The job as the food server lasted a week. She managed to move from one job to the next easily.

Patricia worked in a service department of a car dealership. Even though she liked the work a lot, the “downfall of all of that was you worked with all men. Back then sexual harassment and things like that weren’t a big deal. You just brushed it off. Otherwise I’d be a millionaire now. If I could have sued, like they do now, I would be rich.” Patricia worked there until she married.

Patricia continued to work until she got pregnant with their first child. “Getting pregnant was a surprise – my husband was working away. He would be gone all week; he was home only one day a week so I didn’t think I would get pregnant. It was wonderful.” After taking a year off she returned back to work at a bank. It was a part time job even though she worked 40 hours per week. “Jobs would always pop up for me and I would always take a better job all of the time.” At the same time, she began having trouble with her marriage.

Emotional setbacks happened at this time, including a hospitalization for anxiety. She did not work for about a year. When she did begin working, she began working as an aerobics
instructor with her sister. They had their own small place “just to give me extra money.” Then her second son arrived and they purchased a home. But even then she sold Pampered Chef and Beauty Control. “When I wasn’t working, I would try to do stuff like that.”

Patricia thought it was nice to be at home but “it drove me crazy. It drove me nuts.” This need to be busy and working resulted in her next period of employment. She worked many hours, got promoted, loved the job, but had a terrible boss. “My boss was tough. He was like a narcissist. He would belittle me in front of other people.” At the same time she was working so many hours she was unable to be home when her sons needed her. “They would call me crying and they wanted me home, and that’s when I decided to quit.” She did not work for “a while.” In reality, the period of time was six to seven months. Even then, Patricia continued to sell Beauty Control.

The next job was found through a referral by her network of contacts. Even though she did not like the politics involved with the job, she quit that job only when her son was diagnosed with diabetes. It’s been two years since she has worked. It was the first time in her career that she has been unemployed for an extended length of time. “I have been busy with my son, but it’s driving me kind of crazy.” And even though she thinks of herself as unemployed, she worked on Sunday mornings to help out a friend. This was her current situation. Patricia’s resume was a cluster of jobs that are related by the fact that there was no plan to enter a certain job or career. The drive to work stems from her family values and entrepreneurial example.

Susan. After graduation from high school Susan believed that she would go to business school, graduate and have a career for a short time. Even though her father would have provided the money to go to college she passed on the offer. It “irritated the heck out of him.” Instead she suggested her father send her brothers to college. “I assumed I would go to business school, go
to work for a couple of years, get married, stop working, have kids, white picket fence, house—all of that.” At first that plan did work out. Susan graduated from a secretarial program at a business school, obtained employment, and married. She thought that someday she would get pregnant and stop working.

Instead she was laid off and never did get pregnant. Her husband was also laid off from his job and they moved to another state for his employment offer. “I kept thinking we are going to have a family and I will quit and stay home. And I didn’t think of having a career or anything like that.” A new job kept offering promotions and eventually a manager position in the customer service department. “I loved the job—put in long hours. But I still didn’t believe that I needed to support myself.”

But then her husband decided to move back to Pennsylvania and she did not see the sensibility in that. If she gave up her job, both of them would not have jobs. They still had not sold the house in Pennsylvania. She then began to support both of them with her job, even taking a second job to pay the bills. She summed it up with “it wasn’t like our marriage was all that solid at the time.”

After returning to Pennsylvania, Susan remained unemployed until she got a call from a friend to work in human resources for a company outside of Pennsylvania. The company was rapidly growing and offered promotions for her hard work. Eventually she had a sizable salary, responsibilities, and a job she loved at a company that she loved. Professional development seminars on human resources provided the knowledge for continuous promotions because Susan did not have an undergraduate degree.

The company went public and the new employees changed the personality of the company. “They started hiring sharks. And the sharks were rewarded, and the behavior was
rewards.” A second marriage was also causing stress. After quitting the human resources job, stress continued to build at home with her husband and step-daughter. She began traveling back and forth to Pennsylvania to care for her mother’s declining health.

Susan began another job that required retraining for a new field. The job was ideal because the environment was conducive to managing the demands of her family. However, Susan continued to have problems which lead to her regretfully quitting that job. Susan was “going downhill” and separated from her husband. They are still married but separated. She describes him as a “good man, someone that I still love.”

Susan returned to Pennsylvania, bought her own place, and found another small job to suit her needs. For a while she worked at that local neighborhood business, and appreciated the interaction with customers and friendly atmosphere. But the monotony became too much and without a degree, the work was not going to change. She also realized that alcohol had become a problem, so she went into rehab. She moved in with her father and quit her job. For now, this arrangement meets both of their needs: she is not isolated and she can help him get around. “It’s meant to be, you know, everything is meant to be . . .” is how Susan describes her current situation.

Results

The central research question of the study was how do the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of unemployed younger baby boom women affect their career decision-making experience? These subsidiary questions delve further into the subject of the central research question.

1. How do the bioecological spheres of human development affect the career decision-making experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women?
2. How does the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood affect the career decision-making experience of younger baby boom women?

3. How does womanhood affect the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women?

4. What criteria do unemployed younger baby boom women use to evaluate or define vocational alternatives?

**Results of the Central Research Question**

How do the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of unemployed younger baby boom women affect their career decision-making experience?

The women shared many similar thoughts, assumptions, and opinions which affected the career decision-making experience while unemployed at their current age. Creswell (2013) describes the sorting of participant experience as *textural description* or “what the participant’s in the study experienced with the phenomenon” and the sorting of setting and context as *structural description* or “how the experience happened” (pp. 193-194).

The phrases were gathered together, sorted, and are reported here as significant themes between the individual interviews. Table 4 provides a cross case analysis which illustrates the saturation of the phrases of significant themes between the interviewees. Table 4 on the following page.
Table 4

Central Research Question Cross Case Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Meaning of unemployment</th>
<th>Career aspirations</th>
<th>Digital natives</th>
<th>Stereotypes/appearances</th>
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**Theme: Meaning of unemployment.** The women shared their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about how this period of unemployment affected their career decision-making experience. Their descriptive comments were overt as well as nuanced references. Eight women are represented in the findings.

**Donna.** Donna was unemployed 3.5 weeks. Donna described herself as an active person while talking about unemployment. She would not consider “slowing down and taking it easy.” She began her job search immediately. Donna has a bachelor’s degree and a substantial resume of work with a well-known employer that moved out of the area. She did not voluntarily stop working; she is a displaced worker. “I am an active person, responsible, and ready to get back to work.” She is healthy and wants to use the time ahead to work.

Donna also talked about this period of unemployment as a chance to serve as a role model to her nieces in a number of ways. She described her ability to show how her sense of responsibility and work ethic translates to success in the job search. Donna projects confidence
and resilience that is infectious. Unemployment was a temporary condition and not a permanent state or cause for sadness or regret.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly was unemployed 12 months after she retired from her previous long-term job. Kimberly felt that being unemployed at this point of her life is “wonderful.” Taking time off of work at this point of her life gave her a chance to “get better acquainted with me. I’m taking more time for me.” Kimberly had been heavily involved in helping her family, her church, and her employer with responsibilities they imposed on her. During this time off she has a chance to become more self-aware.

Kimberly began her self-introspection prior to her retirement. She would use one day a week for a “Me Day.” Before Kimberly retired she was trying to get better acquainted with who she was. “Don’t call me. I’m not doing this for you. Because believe it or not, when you work all of this time, you don’t know, you get lost in the shuffle. And I had to start all over and find out who I was.”

When she first was unemployed, she agreed that it was “scary.” But she was advised to create a routine to her life. She was told to create a schedule so she had a plan. “If you are not careful, you will dread getting up in the morning. Because you have nothing to do or you will get into a rut.” She was told that there is a tendency to keep putting off thinking about the future. So each day she had a plan, and some days she had a plan to take some time off from the plan. Unemployment represented a time to be better aware of her potential for the future.

Kimberly gave herself another 12 months to find a job. She read the job bulletins regularly in order to review the latest job openings. “I just don’t want a job that will set me back, because believe it or not, going through all of this job preparation training has . . . I don’t want to sell myself short. I don’t want to stop at the first thing. There’s too much out there to be offered
for me to accept the first thing that comes along. Cause that way I’ll put myself right back where I started from.”

Kimberly was optimistic about her future. “It’s so good to have a choice and know you could do it. I’m free, I am a free women now. So you can’t cage a free woman. I am not going to settle! I know there is a whole world out there I can explore.” She felt that with all of the skills she already had and then learned, she will be in demand.

**Linda.** Linda was unemployed for 18 months. Linda had mixed feelings about being unemployed at this point in her life. She described one part as “new freedom.” After “years and years and years of work and striving” she recognized the freedom and opportunity implicit in the face of unemployment and searching for new employment. Linda also used terms like “locked into” and described an ongoing cycle of thinking about “what’s the next challenge.” But she also said she “feels guilty” because her friends of the same age are struggling to find work. She has to ignore the thought that she “should be out there and just take the first thing that’s coming along.” To sum up, unemployment meant a mixed reaction but overall she was more positive in her situation.

She has had both “tremendous supporters” and doubters. She has one uncle who thinks “it’s crazy to go back to school when you are unemployed. You should be working for a university and let them pay for it. And you shouldn’t be incurring the expense.” This has had an influence on Linda. “I thought, oh my gosh, am I making the wrong decision? Maybe I should be doing something else but in my heart I was doing the right thing.”

At another point of the interview, Linda acknowledged the “myriad of feelings” and that she imagined that people probably do use labels when they think about her unemployment and attending graduate school for her Ph.D. Linda has not ever heard anyone verbalize anything
negative but sometimes, “and it might be my own sensitivity, when I hear them as if (pause), I’ve always had a strong work ethic and it’s almost like you don’t have a work ethic.” But Linda turns that around and thinks about the measures she took at this point in her life that most people would not consider. So she reversed the affect the label or the impression of the label would have had. Linda reminded me “it’s healthier.”

Lisa. Lisa was unemployed for three months. Lisa was one of the few women who work occasionally to help out a friend. The question of whether she was unemployed came up almost immediately while doing the demographic questionnaire. Lisa had a difficult time saying she was unemployed, but when she could explain her meaning of unemployment, she was ready to talk about her circumstances.

Lisa’s parents held prestigious jobs. She had a hard time with talking about being out of work. The conversation slowed when the question was asked and she faltered in her sentences. “Um, it is depressing. It is, um, I’ve always felt, I always connected with who I am is what I do for a living, that kind of thing.” She reminded me of the social convention that includes asking “what do you do?” when meeting someone for the first time. “I have a stigma. You have to, you have to be employed. And it, it should be, and I would be ashamed if I would say I dig ditches, nothing wrong with ditch diggers but I always thought of myself (searching for the right word) as someone with a job and a title.” She felt it went back to her formation growing up. Her parents emphasized that having a job with a title and using her education was important. “I think of myself as less of a person because I don’t have a job with a title.”

Mary. Mary was unemployed two months. In a certain way of understanding, Mary does not seem like someone who is unemployed. She has an employer but was working very few hours in order to attend college. Mary did not consider herself as having a career with that
employer. Her career as homemaker and mother was fading which made her seem like the other unemployed women in the sample.

Early in the interview transcript, Mary clarified how her experience was much like the other women in the sample. “It’s very hard, but because I was a stay at home mom I feel like now, this was the time. After everyone’s gone that I could have developed some sort of career.” Listening to Mary, it was almost more proper to consider her as unemployed from being the stay at home mom and now she is searching for her next professional position. She certainly expected that she would have a career and use her education. But her former education would not be suitable due to the physical demands required in the retail industry. At the end of this section of the transcript, Mary reminded me that she wanted to still be available for her grandchildren.

**Michelle.** Michelle was unemployed 15 years. Michelle was not working at the time of the interview but her days are filled between home schooling her two youngest children and attending her own college classes. She expected to complete the training program in three to four years and transition to her new career at that point. She was making decisions now to plan for the future time “when they don’t need me anymore.”

Michelle specifically explained that the time she stayed home to provide home-schooling was the only proper decision for her and her family. But she also “looked forward for years for them not to need me anymore. Please let it be now.” When Michelle and her husband decided to follow a more traditional style of child-rearing, she expected the period of time to be shorter. They had children over a wide range of years; her first two children were 10 and 12 years old when the youngest two were born. “I didn’t expect for a great portion of my married life to be doing this still.” She explained the age spread and then “so it was a surprise to suddenly have to
continue in this mommy role.” Michelle has no regrets about their decision—“it is a good thing”—but she will be happy when the home-schooling job is over. Michelle was carefully balancing her ongoing traditional homemaker role with her new college student role.

**Patricia.** Patricia was unemployed two years. Patricia was very emotional while talking about how this period of unemployment affected her career decisions. “Every time I try to fix myself and move on, something happens. I’ve worked all my life, except when I was pregnant and having kids. It’s the first time I have been unemployed this long.” Patricia described what she was doing to find her next job and transition into a new career. It sounded like a project or homework. She has a notebook to record what she learned about certain jobs and careers.

She was working with a man to help him out and in exchange, she was learning QuickBooks. “It’s kind of nice for me because it keeps my mind off of taking care of everybody else. Until I am really set and I find what I need to do then, that’s my goal.” Patricia was learning all that she can about herself, her skills, her interests, and potential work that might offer her some way to be happy.

Patricia struggled with the question “Is it time for me?” She has so many obligations and concerns obstructing her path. The health of her son and her role as the caregiver was one that surfaced during the timeline exercise. “I’m afraid to kind of move forward but I think I am ready.” This extended period of unemployment has given her son time to learn how to manage diabetes. Unemployment also freed Patricia from the stress of managing a job and her caregiving role.

In the past she would have found a job when her husband pressured her to get a job. She would take the first thing that was available and make it work out. She would like her husband to support her decision to look for a better fit for her career but, “it doesn’t bother me as much as
it used to. He doesn’t press me down as much as he used to.” She has decided to use her current unemployment to work on herself, to brush up on computer skills, and in the meantime get results from her own medical tests.

“I’m going to be 52, I have to do something. If it doesn’t work, then I can always quit. It’s something I have to do. I don’t want to give up.” Patricia spoke with a certainty that comes from a successful career history even though it had frequent changes. “I have never been fired from a job. It’s always either I quit the job or the job was no longer there. I always, you know, just worked hard.”

**Susan.** Susan was unemployed six months. Susan was unemployed in order to work on her alcohol addiction which she attributes to a demanding employment atmosphere, a failing second marriage, and coping with aging parents. Her last five years have been up and down. Ultimately she succeeded in beating her addiction and restoring her self-esteem. “All of those plans that I ever had in life are gone. And now I am sitting here and I am 55 and what do I do. Do I just stay here taking care of dad? No, that will put me right back where I was. I made a lot of progress and I like to keep it that way.”

Her unemployment meant another chance to restore her earlier version of herself with the knowledge gained from her last period of struggles.

I always wonder, OK God, you brought me this far, what’s your plan? Why? And I wish he would just come and write it on a piece of paper and be done with it because you know I ask and I ask. I am trying to listen, and I really am.

She will make the journey with God and trust that the plan will work out.

**Summary of emergent themes.** The composite description, the “essence of the experience”, emerges after reviewing the textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013).
The eight women viewed unemployment as either a threatening event or a fortunate event. The composite description relates back to the central problem of the study. The problem of unemployment at the age of 51 to 61 years of age may be an urgent need to become employed. Five of the eight women thought of the period of unemployment as a normal event that would enhance their future. Three of the eight women were worried about unemployment and thought of it as a threat. The differences in the emergent theme was an example of polarization (Smith et al., 2009).

*Unemployment as normal.* Five of the women were similar in their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about unemployment as a growth period and a positive experience. These women used descriptive terms like “active, new career, and wonderful” to convey the positive view of this time in their career decision making. One of the five thought she served as a role model for younger nieces who could learn how to manage a career search while unemployed.

*Unemployment as a threat.* Three of the women were more negative in describing their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about this period of unemployment at this age. There were negative feelings such as depression and guilt about being unemployed. One informant described this period as a time to “fix herself,” as if previous periods of employment were unacceptable or she were broken. The women were guarded while describing their experiences. Listening to the audio interview, the listener detects each informant’s thoughtful description of the meaning of unemployment at her current age. There were tears and sadness at times.

**Theme: Career aspirations.** Making a career decision typically culminates in an action (Amundson, 1995). At the time of the interview, the women were asked to share their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions that affect the career decision-making experience. One of the eight
decided not to change careers through retraining or retooling her skills. Seven of the eight women planned to act on or prepare to act on their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions by changing their career field. The textural and structural descriptions follow.

**Donna.** Donna would take a job in her field or a closely related field when one comes available. She would prefer to work and continue to take night classes. She plans to enhance her skills and continue her professional development to acquire a higher paying job. She plans to add more certifications and degrees to her previous education to remain in her field or a related field. She feels that her years of experience and updated training would make her well-suited for a career closely like her previous one. Donna was unemployed 3 1/2 weeks when we met.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly worked in the retail industry for 38 years prior to retirement. She did not leave her employer prior to this time because beginning a new job with a new employer would have meant starting over. She never wanted to begin over and lose certain benefits like accrued vacation time. When the right time came to retire, she decided she wanted to do something else. She plans to evaluate future job offers.

I am not as young as I used to be so I am not just going to run in and take it (a job). So now, with my future, I want a job that I can go in and be responsible for and do my work and leave. I’m not looking for no [sic] great leadership role. I’m really not. I want to now be a worker, just go in and do my job. Be kind, courteous and come home. No extras.

She also does not want a job that is too taxing physically, such as working with handicapped or older people. She would not mind working with those populations but the physical part would be too much. “I’m older now. I can’t do that labor part. I also don’t want to get tied up with emotional connections.”
Kimberly expects to work in certain jobs that emphasize “paper pushing and computers.” She would like to work in an office. “When people hear I am a sales associate, they think I can just wait on people. It’s so much more. You have to order things, you have to supply, you have to make sure things are set up, you got to make sure everybody knows the rules, everyone is doing what they are supposed to do to make it function and work well.” Kimberly easily listed the skills she planned to use in her new field.

**Linda.** Linda worked in her field since the age of 21. Her former employer discontinued her job and similar jobs in the area were limited. She had worked her way up to a top administrative leadership role which may open periodically but not regularly. She is not ruling out her former field but is more interested in opening up avenues she had not explored before. She is in a doctoral program in educational leadership. “What I find is that I am trying to take a step at a time. Right now there are some aspects that are developing but there are other aspects that are influencing what I do. I’m open to a couple of different things in my future career.”

Linda compared herself to a few of her friends who were also going through career changes, and she was surprised by the certainty of their careers. She said she learned from them because some of them have never had their plans materialize. She recognized how her personality would affect her style of career decision. “I think there is something to be said for having a little bit of a humble way.” She continued to describe what she learned and summed up her future goal as

I don’t know if you can predict—certainly you can work towards goals, but I don’t think anyone can say for sure what the future holds. Your life can change in a nanosecond. I’ve seen that all too often with patients, so it’s the reality. It’s taking one step at a time,
one thing at a time, and doing the best that you can. But I do think, I feel that I am on the right track.

**Lisa.** Lisa had been looking for a job in her former field but has been unemployed for three months. Even though she had an interview for a supervisory position, her network of friends in the field have told her that a younger candidate took the job. But more recently Lisa is going through the licensing process for pastoral ministry. She is transitioning to pastoral ministry but thinks of this decision as “following her calling” rather than making a career choice. She has an arrangement with a church elder to alternate between two churches. She has been in the pulpit and was thinking about going to seminary to finish the licensing process.

**Mary.** Mary has changed fields; she has a college degree in fashion merchandising and does not plan to work in the retail field in the future. The work is too physical and demanding. “I liked the work that was my career choice.” Mary felt that she would not work in that field any longer because she did not have the “stamina to be in a retail type, management position.” She had shoulder surgery six months ago and can’t do any heavy lifting.

“So I knew I had to be in a situation where I am behind a desk.” She describes the job as something that won’t discriminate with age. She does not have her CPA so “therefore I am only qualified for certain support type of work.” Mary researched and found a certification program so that she can become more valuable to her employer. Even though Mary works part-time as a support staff with her employer, she plans a change to a more professional position. At that point, Mary will consider herself to be working in her career.

**Michelle.** Michelle has not worked outside her home for 15 years. She provided home-schooling for her children. Her change of field involved retraining. The interview took place at this point in her preparation. She researched her career field including the credentials required to
begin the career. She expected to be in the community college program for three years. This provides requisite time for certification and passing her boards. When graduation occurs, her children will not be home schooled and she can pursue the new career. She will be trained to work in the healthcare field.

**Patricia.** Patricia was working on Sundays to help out a friend who owns a local restaurant. She planned to make a major change of career. She sent out resumes regularly but never heard a response.

It’s just, well, my ultimate goal, what I really truly want to do is be a flight attendant. My aunt did it. She became a flight attendant at the age of 48. And she did it for six or seven years. I want to do something—I love flying!

She is not particular about which airline and can picture working with private airlines and corporate flying. She has been doing research on the hiring process. Recently she began to wonder if her health problems would interfere with the physical work requirements involved for a flight attendant.

**Susan.** Susan worked in two distinctly different fields earlier in her career: human resources and food service.

I am taking classes and I am trying to decide (my future career). Because people say, “what do you want to do?” I don’t know. There is part of me—I want to make a ton of money. That’d be nice but what I want to do every day is a little bit different than when I was in my 20s and 30s. I think about what I want to do every day.

Susan is more interested in satisfying a personal need through her work but still able to be head of household to support herself. She recognized the complicated answer to that question, even the geographical influence of the labor market. She wanted work in the same county so she
could continue to support her father in his later years. She pictures leaving the area for a better job market when her father no longer needs her. She was consciously and deliberately working on discerning what would be best for her immediate future as well as in 30 years.

**Summary of emergent themes.** In order to develop the composite description, the theme of career aspiration was analyzed on the type of action predominant in the informant’s transcript. Simply, the career decision involved doing something new or different or staying in the same field.

*No change.* One woman (Donna) was more enthusiastic about getting employment quickly with her current skills but would update and extend her technology skills while working in her new position. Time and confidence in her skills were central to this decision. She was unemployed for the least amount of time. Her company was purchased and relocated so she was a dislocated worker.

*Career change.* The remaining seven women would seek a career change. Further analysis of this composite description revealed three emergent themes: career choice based on physical ability due to age; career choice based on purpose or calling; and career choice based on fluctuating needs.

Two women specifically left their career field due to a need to have less physical work and more work requiring cognitive ability. Both women worked in retail and stated that the lifting and long hours were taxing. Each woman very specifically outlined the amount of physical labor required to do well in the field and her personal limitations. Both were managers or would have been managers if they chose to stay in the retail environment. Their new career fields will involve retraining and both are free to invest the time to learning their new job.
Three of the women identified determining their future career aspirations by listening to God. Two were specific about a career field and future work, while the third woman (Susan) was still weighing options. Ultimately her actions would be driven by “listening” to discern God’s plan.

The remaining two women were planning for change in career field but were not certain about what the future would bring. Both informants were unemployed for at least 18 months and retraining. One similarity between both was physical health. Both had the experience of understanding how a plan could be changed suddenly due to a diagnosis. A good statement to summarize the theme would be “certainly you can work towards goals, but I don’t think anyone can say for sure what the future holds” (Linda).

**Theme: Digital natives.** The women spoke explicitly about career decisions affected by younger job candidates who grew up with technology. Other women described efforts to become more comfortable with workplace technology. This theme arose without any prompting from the researcher. They assumed that they had less skill in technology because they were newer users. Five of the eight women addressed this theme during their interview.

**Donna.** Donna was interested in learning more about computer skills. Her department was responsible for external and internal communication about the industry. This required a great deal of proficiency in electronic communication. However, Donna was familiar with her former employer’s systems and software. She intended to learn more about software applications and troubleshooting computers. “Since I have started school, I’ve found that even at my age, I can enhance and better my skills and development to acquire a higher paying job.” She did not comment about those who were younger, already trained, and competing for the jobs she planned to apply for in the future.
**Kimberly.** Kimberly talked about the younger generation, known as digital natives, in two main contexts. The first was related to how it will be to work and communicate with younger co-workers. People send messages to each other even when they are sitting across the room from each other. “That’s when I found out people do not talk to each other.”

The second context was working with technology in the work environment. Kimberly learned computer applications in a class for unemployed workers in transition. “I am trying to learn these computers, and there is so much to learn, so much to take in.” She would need more time to learn the software. “And I felt like I was holding up the class. It is kind of intimidating. But you have to know who you are in order to do this. I think you have to be strong because I will have to accept rejection. Rejection isn’t always a negative thing. It’s a lack of understanding thing. I had to learn that and I don’t take it to heart.” Kimberly had to develop confidence to ask questions in the software applications class.

**Linda.** Linda recognized the need to update her technology skills to navigate her career change. “I didn’t grow up with technology, being in my age group. So I felt in education, there is so much changing. I wanted to be able to delve into the technology vs. what I have to do.” By this she means that she wanted to become a natural user, to feel comfortable in the digital realm. She was “working with a lot of spreadsheets and technology in everyday work but I was learning whatever the employer’s system was.”

In addition to learning new technology, Linda learned what it was like to be a student in the academic environment with today’s technology. She described the exposure as formal and informal education with the technology. “For example, on several projects you work in small groups. There are those colleagues that are very computer savvy. They are computer designers, they are teaching online courses for universities.” Linda learned how to set up a Google
document in the cloud. She also worked on a book publishing project that required online collaboration. “I really found it as a growth experience. I may have been able to get a job that offered me that exposure but it would have been different. And I wouldn’t have been able to really explore the details.” This last example illustrated one of the various ways she expanded her understanding of contemporary communication with technological tools in order to prepare for her future career.

**Mary.** Mary took keyboarding and additional technology classes as an older adult. But she felt left behind on the technology and the shortcuts that frequent users know.

I’m constantly saying, “what did you just do?” when it comes to using technology. For example, my son kept telling me to use control V and I’m like, “what are you talking about?” There are just things that they have because they were there from the beginning.

Mary intended to work on learning more about computer software applications and when that knowledge was combined with her work experience, she would be the better employee.

Mary also had some coaching from her daughter. “Mom, if you need to know something you can just Google it. You can find just about everything on Google now.” Mary told this story:

I just laugh when I have to interact with the CPAs sometimes, who I might add are my age, you know, and I’ll tell them “just go on whatever” and they’ll say “wait” and I’ll have to go around and show them.”

Mary was happy to be able to show she can do the support work but also wanted to know how the whole operation ran. She attributed this drive to being an owner of a business. “You need to know everything to make that business run.”
Susan. Susan thought that the “young kid”, the one who grew up with the technology would be better qualified for a job on that skill alone.

I am not that great with technology anyway. It’s not a natural for me, I have to work at it. The kids growing up have such an advantage. So when you go in for an interview, if there are technical skills involved, I can get by. You can teach me but I wouldn’t say that I’m proficient.

She envied the younger applicants who grew up with technology and utilized the technology without much effort.

Susan explained one of the benefits of using the employment service was learning programs like Excel, Word, and programs like that which she had not used lately. Refresher classes would help with recall. She had used them in early years of her career but not recently when she worked as a cook. Working at a corporation was different. “A lot of it is a reminder for me which is great. It was back in there somewhere; some of it has changed over the years.”

Writing a resume has changed a great deal. There are programs that remove steps for the recruiter. Most times, the recruiter no longer screens every resume. Since Susan may return to the field of human resources, this technology will likely be discussed in a job interview.

Summary of emergent themes. After sorting the textural and structural descriptions of the digital natives theme, there is one predominant composite theme. The consensus of the younger baby boom women was that success in the current labor market required technology literacy. More than half of the women were retraining or updating computer skills to avoid losing a job to a digital native. The composite description confirms the consensus of opinion: even with recent work experience, the women felt threatened by the younger generation who grew up with technology and were more comfortable with technology. In general, the women
wanted to feel at ease with the technology and develop a proficiency to be competitive in the labor market.

**Theme: Stereotypes/appearances.** As job applicants, the women were cognizant of outside influences on their job search, specifically those related to age, gender, and race. Thinking about the career decision-making process included consideration for stereotypes and judgments made about them. The thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of six of the eight women are collected in this theme. The textural and structural descriptions lead to better understanding of discriminatory experiences as well as perceptions about potential discrimination.

**Donna.** Donna commented “at my age” so the awareness of looking older was definitely spoken. Donna was confident that the combination of her age and experiences would tip the hiring decision in her favor. She also felt that she would negotiate a better salary due to her significant work history. While most of the women openly discussed their thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about appearances or stereotypes of late middle age recruits, Donna was one of two women who could comment on being a racial minority along with the other demographics. Donna explicitly addressed how her appearance may cause racial discrimination due to stereotype.

During previous job searches, Donna did not have dreadlocks. “I avoided my African history by not wearing them for being stereotyped. I changed my look and added them because I’m comfortable with me now.” Donna described a Black Friday shopping experience to clarify the reaction people have to her dreadlocks. “America sees African Americans with dreads as more threatening.” Shoppers tried to cut in line and created a disturbance in the store. Security came to settle the disturbance and automatically assumed she was responsible. Even when those around her tried to convince the security officers that she was not the source of the trouble, they
were reluctant to believe her. She thought she might get arrested. Donna said it is common for people to think she is rough, trouble-making, or from the Caribbean because of her hair.

Regarding her current job search,

I would hope that society would see me as what I can offer the company I’m working with. I still have to make changes to modify my dreads so not to be rejected for positions. Those modifications would be to wear my hair in a ponytail or up in a professionally accepted style.

She felt her personality and interpersonal skills would outweigh any influence of stereotypes. She also planned to look for work outside the rural county where she lives. She stated that there is more work for “educated, Black females in Pittsburgh. The market would be extremely better in bigger metropolitan cities like Washington, D.C. or North Carolina.”

**Linda.** Linda reflected on the fact that she had thought about how she would be compared to others who are 25 years younger and applying for the same job. Instead of worry and apprehension about the possible age discrimination, Linda observed a leveling of the factors:

What I have found over this past year and half was younger classmates almost have the same kind of challenges that I do. If I am challenged by a certain assignment, or statistics [course], and I am thinking it’s because I haven’t had statistics in 25 years. And then I hear them complaining about the same problem.

Linda realized that her problems will be much the same as younger applicants, and she has gained self-confidence because of her classroom experience. Linda would be able to use this example to her advantage when interviewed in the future for a job.

**Lisa.** Lisa had two distinct examples of how age and appearances would affect her career decision. When she interviewed for a supervisory human services position, an inside contact
learned that she did not get the job because the organization offered the job to a younger, recent college graduate for less money. They could pay her less since she still lived at home with her parents. Lisa laughed off the incident but the overtones in her voice revealed her disappointment with the decision. “I spent over 30 years learning and growing but here is this person just out of college with no experience but has the book knowledge. I might have forgotten more than she even knows.” Her age has hampered her interview offers. “I don’t even get the chance to talk about it because they assume you would not take the same salary as a 24 year old with less experience.” Lisa said she would consider a job offer for more than just the salary.

Lisa never really had much difficulty with gender in the human services field because most employees are female. But moving into the field of ministry caused her to consider gender awareness. Lisa told me that there was gender bias in the church. “People will just come out and say ‘I don’t believe that women should be in the pulpit.’ I see the gender thing more in the pastoral role.” Lisa did not seem to mind the gender bias.

**Mary.** Mary’s new career field has more men in the occupation than women traditionally. She expected her certification and updated skills to open options for her. In order to gain support for her time from work, Mary had to present the idea of getting the accounting certification to her boss. He was supportive and felt she could improve her position in the company with this education. “He was very excited, he said this will add [to the office] now, but this will make you, well, this is something good.” So Mary has been assured that her hours will increase and she will have more work to do similar to the other male employees.

Mary selected her new career because “as you get older, it doesn’t discriminate with age. It’s the type of job that it’s not going to be an age discriminating type job.” The work will be more cerebral and less physical so Mary decided in favor of this new career. “I’m going to move
forward” on my education and career plan. “I don’t feel as old as I probably look.” Mary sounded as if she adopted a resilient attitude toward working in her new career. “The one thing that I think I have on my side is a good work ethic.” Compared to the recent graduate, “it’s just really obvious” the difference in what a recent graduate expects when they work.

**Patricia.** Patricia felt that her age was working against her in this current job search. She has sent out resumes just as she had about five years ago. But the difference now was that she had no interviews. “I would have at least gotten an interview in the past. I didn’t apply for anything that I couldn’t be qualified for and I wouldn’t even get a call back. That’s kind of a downer.” She thought she would hear from some but to not hear anything was surprising. “I think it does have to do with age, you know.”

**Susan.** Susan did not experience outright problems due to her age but she had wondered how her age would affect her potential in the county labor market. “Um, but now, at my age, I don’t know how many opportunities there really are around.” Her move back to her childhood home created additional doubts for her. “I moved in with my dad. I’m in my 50s and I gotta move in with my dad, you know. Where are you going?”

This statement represented her struggle with adjusting her view of her future and the apparent re-setting of her goals and expectations. She never graduated from college and was successful with her company through internal promotions. Susan felt that “employers want a degree now and in some cases you can argue that you have experience. But depending on the computer program search, my resume may not be picked out because there is no degree on it.” This would not be overt discrimination but she may be excluded from consideration based on her lack of an academic credential even though she had substantial business experience.
**Summary of emergent themes.** The themes represent both textural and structural descriptions of instances of overt discrimination and expectations regarding future discrimination. More than half spoke about age discrimination. Within that group, the themes polarized around positive or negative thoughts, assumptions, and opinions on age discrimination.

_Age and career decision-making experience._ Half of the informants believed that age would be interpreted as having a better work ethic, more work experience, and better problem solving skills. Employers would favor an older applicant over a younger applicant. The narrative aligned with research on expectations of qualities of younger baby boom generation (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006; Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007).

On the negative side, half believed or experienced age discrimination. Compared to job searches when younger, this particular job search was slow and resulted in less interviews. For one informant, she was told by friends who wanted to encourage her, the lack of a job offer was a result of the company hiring a younger candidate. It was not lack of skill but actually an assumption that the company could not afford to hire someone like her with so much experience.

_Discrimination._ Gender and race discrimination were mentioned by three of the women. Two women plan to enter career fields that are traditionally dominated by men. One of the two Black women adopted a more natural hairstyle and was willing to describe her expectations for hiring. The county where she planned to look for a job was more rural and conservative. In the past, she had negative experiences in the community. She hoped to have a better experience in a neighboring county that was a bit more accepting of diversity. The three women confirmed that an applicant seldom proves discrimination but has an expectation of it occurring.
Results of Subsidiary Questions

Subsidiary question 1: How do the bioecological spheres of human development affect the career decision-making experience of the unemployed younger baby boom women?

The first subsidiary question situates the career decision-making process within a context. The research question attempted to explore the connection of the generation and culture to the individual. The bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) was the foundation for the related interview questions.

- What does it mean to you to be unemployed at this particular point in your life?
- Can you recall the thoughts you have had about the economic conditions and the way those thoughts affect your career decision?
- One of the changes to social policy that might affect how younger baby boomers think about their careers is the upcoming changes in the Social Security retirement laws. Are you aware of the changes to the law? What does the change mean to you as someone who is around 50 years old?
- What cultural values affect the career decision-making experience?

Table 5

Themes Generated from Bioecological Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Unemployment and younger baby boom</th>
<th>Economic conditions</th>
<th>Social security policy revision</th>
<th>Cultural values</th>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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**Theme: Meaning of unemployment as younger baby boom.** Unemployment was the current work status but beyond the descriptive meaning of unemployment, five of the eight women had thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about how the period of non-work related to their generational age. They were viewing unemployment and work through the lens of a person who was late middle age with related advantages or disadvantages. The findings represent the composite description in order to adequately portray what and how the women experienced unemployment at this generational age.

**Donna.** Donna agreed that her job seeking as a younger baby boom adult complicates the issue of retirement. She would not have chosen to leave her employment at this time but was dislocated by her company leaving the local labor market. She expected to be very busy during unemployment and that would result in her getting her next job.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly’s opinion about work differences distinguished herself from younger employees. She saw a difference between how younger baby boomers would work:

> When I was doing practice interviews, they don’t want what I have to offer. They want quantity, not quality. And I was not trained for just quantity. I was trained for quality, see, quality was first, then came quantity. But in this one it is quantity and all the other things, then it is quality. So I find that the language is different and to go out and see what they want, it’s very hard because to them I am old fashioned and I am not up to date.

So when you get in an interview and your interviewer is 21 (years old) and you are looking at him or her and you’re thinking, and they know everything. And you are laughing to yourself, you don’t know (laughing). And you have to, what’s the word I want to use,—come down and I don’t mean down off your standards. But you have to bring
yourself down and think I’m talking to my teenager or my nephew because I have to think like they think. They don’t think like I think. 

Because they don’t think that what I am thinking is the right way. But life will tell them it is but right now they don’t see that. So it’s kind of tough when you are sitting in a room full of young people.

Kimberly thought communication was greatly changed as well. The younger generation did not know how to communicate directly with people. She felt it could be observed in the manner of doing the job. She would be more open to communicate with a customer and complete follow-up as part of customer service.

**Linda.** Linda felt that being in the younger baby boom generation would hamper her when it comes to applying for work. The knowledge of technology would be a deficit.

**Lisa.** Lisa thought about the fact that with her years of experience and knowledge she would be a strong candidate for a job. But her recent experience in the job market has made her think that she will have a difficult time getting a job against a younger candidate who will be willing to accept less salary. She would consider a lower salary for the right offer, but employers aren’t going to have that kind of discussion with her. Lisa thought she would like to work for another 15 years.

**Mary.** Mary was not much affected by the fact that she was in the younger baby boom generation. This was not a relevant thought for her career decision-making experience.

**Michelle.** Michelle said that there was no connection between her generation and career decision-making experience. Her career decision was based on her calling from God.

**Patricia.** Patricia thought her job search was affected more by her age than her generational age. She was concerned about her own health and her care-giving roles.
Susan. Susan thought she would work for another 30 years. She has good health and based on her parent’s health, she figures she will be able to live until about 85 years old.

Summary of emergent themes. More than half of the informants agreed that the generational influence of younger baby boom expectations influenced their experience of unemployment. Younger baby boom adults work in a different way than subsequent generations. Most felt that due to good health and the ability to earn income, they would remain in the labor market for more than five years.

Theme: Economic conditions. The question was a direct request to thoughtfully consider how the current economic conditions impacted their decision-making experience. Half of the women commented on how their thoughts, assumptions, or opinions about the economy related to the career decision-making experience.

Donna. Donna thought that she may have a difficult time as an educated, Black woman finding a job that paid as well as her former job. She expected to look in Pittsburgh, or at least outside of the rural county where she lived. She said that the best opportunities for her would be in Washington, D.C. or North Carolina.

Kimberly. Kimberly was concerned with the current economic conditions. “I do think about the financial area of it.” Kimberly would look for a job that not only will make the money, but also go out there and find something she can do. She was not only interested in the monetary gain.

Linda. Linda thought about the economic ramifications a great deal. She reviewed her financial situation before making any decisions. This advice came from friends who also recently were unemployed.
So I felt that I had that (financial advice) as a strong point and strong guidance up front. When I looked at it I just felt, I don’t have dependents, I don’t have debt, I have an opportunity with some extra monies that I have saved and that – that there is still a risk. I could be losing time and money and there might not be just the right job at the end of the tunnel. But I felt that it was worth the risk for personal reasons as well as the opportunities. Plus I have additional resources for new jobs being in a school situation, which is true when I have applied for different jobs. Employers were more interested in me because I was updating skills and that I was enrolled in a Ph.D. program.

Linda was advised to use her period of unemployment to return to higher education to be competitive for future jobs.

*Lisa.* Lisa answered the economic question by combining the problem of social security together with the economic necessity of working. She would work another 15 years because she does not expect the pot of money to be available when she is ready to retire. She thought the law of supply and demand was pretty clear. There are too many eligible retirees to take out than there are workers to put in for younger baby boom retirements.

*Mary.* Mary had nothing to say about the current economy related to her job. Since she already had an employer waiting for her to finish training she had no urgent issues.

*Michelle.* Michelle was not concerned about the economic implications of her career choice because God would reveal how the plan would progress. She was not tied to the economy.

*Patricia.* Patricia did not see a connection between her lack of responses from her resume and the economy. She felt that the employers were looking for younger applicants.
Summary of emergent themes. There were a variety of factors whether the informant connected economic conditions to the career decision-making experience. Several thought of the labor market and cycle of job growth for the region when answering the question. Others thought of their immediate need for income or had not considered the connection between career decision-making and economic cycles.

Theme: Social security policy changes. Each participant was given the opportunity to reflect on what significance the delay of social security eligibility would have on the career decision. Three informants were not eligible for social security benefit due to their previous work history.

Donna. Donna said that she began saving in an employee contribution plan early in her career because of the volatile pension programs. She was not particularly concerned about extending her time working except that she would earn less in the local area as an educated, experienced, Black woman facing discrimination.

Kimberly. Kimberly was making decisions based on her eligibility for Social security being available in five years.

Linda. Linda was able to describe her thoughts on social security as well as how she felt about the delayed filing dates.

Well I was aware of age 67 because I complained about it years ago: ‘it’s not fair, I’m paying into the system and there won’t be anything left for me.’ And maybe that helped me at this point because between knowing that they increased the social security age and that being at the end of the baby boomers, just the laws of supply and demand in population age groups, it may be there’s nothing left in future government funds.
Linda had begun saving and was not relying on having her retirement funded entirely by Social Security.

**Lisa.** Lisa doesn’t expect to collect her full eligibility from Social Security. Due to the law of supply and demand, she believed that the supply will be too diminished by the time she would be 67.

**Mary and Michelle.** Mary and Michelle did not expect to have Social Security and had other plans for retirement income.

**Patricia.** Patricia did not have substantial work that would qualify for Social Security eligibility. She said she has a small pension. She was aware of the fact that her husband will collect Social Security and what could happen if she were to get divorced.

**Susan.** Susan was candid about how she felt about Social Security:

Well, I know I am not counting on Social Security to get me through, certainly. And luckily, while I was at my human resources job, I was paid very well toward the end and I had good benefits so I have a nice 401K. Um I have, I sold some of the stock and put it into investments, I don’t have enough money to retire now but I am not going to live on just social security. I don’t . . . if it is there great, but I am not counting on it.

Yea, I am one that if I played the lottery and I won, they ask do you want a lump sum or over a period of time. I would say pay it in the lump sum even though you pay more taxes. I don’t care, I don’t trust you to pay me over time, I want it now in my hand and if I have to pay more taxes on it that’s fine. I don’t trust you to pay me for the next 20 years or whatever the time is but that’s kind of how I am. A little distrustful, a little cynical I guess.
Susan also felt she learned from living through her father’s experience of retirement pensions and would not have the same problems.

**Summary of emergent themes.** As the lengthy quotes demonstrated, a few of the women were candid about the lack of trust for the program. If the informant had money collected for Social Security, they had thought about the law of supply and demand. Due to their later arrival than older baby boom retirees, the consensus was that some alternative had to be available to fund retirement. A few never worked or worked so little that they already had other plans for retirement income.

**Theme: Cultural values.** There was an explicit question whether cultural values affected the career decision. For those who were unsure of the meaning of cultural values, a chart of a range of cultural values was available. The cultural values about meaning of work surfaced during additional interview questions, as well as during the lifeline reflection. Every woman supplied information on how thoughts, assumptions, or opinions about values affected her career decision-making experience.

**Donna.** Donna learned from her father early in her work experience that responsibility was prime. He also emphasized education as a way to improve economic status. Donna was proud of her family and was close to them. She wants to be highly involved with her extended family and for the current time will concentrate her job search in the local geographic area. Religion was important to her; however, the connection to her current job search was not elaborated.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly finished this discussion by stating that she would look at work as well as salary. “Because sometimes you gotta start off small to work your way up but I don’t want a job where I can just stay here. I want a job where everything is open and I can further
myself.” This was a common theme for the women. They would like a job that expects a good work ethic and values employees.

**Linda.** Linda thought there were a few cultural values that were important to her. From an early age, work ethic was important since it was part of her family expectations. She would include in this definition a certain expectation of mastery in the career as well as accomplishing a level of employment. “From the time we were young, the value of education was stressed by my parents.” But she went on to say that were experiences in her career that did not relate to her level of education. “I would say there are certain conservative aspects and respect for tradition. And certainly there is a certain amount of freedom that comes with all of the above. Harmony—I like collaborative aspects.” Linda concluded with the importance of having strong family values. Her relationships with family and friends influenced her so that she can be practical.

**Lisa.** Lisa thought she had a better than average exposure to a wide variety of people of different backgrounds. She felt that she was unusual for the generation even though baby boomers rallied for equal rights. “I have always been someone that has always been around a wide variety of diversity. I have a lot of diversity experience. I work with people from a lot of different backgrounds. This has helped me to look at things from a different perspective.”

Lisa described a situation recently when she was in the pulpit on a recent Sunday. A national story broke about a person who went into a church and shot a number of people because they were attending a certain church. Here is how Lisa told what happened to her:

A young man walked in who had never been in the church before. A nice young man, a nice looking fella—but he came into the back of the church and he sat down. And for that split second, my mind went to uh-oh you know, does he have a gun. It’s sad because last week ago I would never had thought about him coming into the church. Hopefully let’s
pray that he is fed and he will come back next time. But for the split second, it only lasted for that short time. Once I got to talk to him—but for the split second, I had that thought, and it wasn’t a nice thought.

Lisa was affected by the recent news in a way that conflicted with her personal values. Since she would like to work in pastoral ministry, she was aware of the affect her cultural values might have on her future work.

Lisa was also one of the several women who thought she had a strong work ethic due to her family belief in hard work and value of education.

**Mary.** Mary was in a training program in order to work in the next year but her strong commitment to family values would be paramount to any career choice. She wanted job flexibility so that she would work only when her family did not need her.

**Michelle.** Michelle has conservative values based on her religious beliefs. She has a traditional role in her family as mother and housewife until her two youngest children are grown and she follows her call to serve God in her next life role.

**Patricia.** Patricia grew up influenced by the entrepreneurial attitude of her father. She was a hard worker. She was confident that her previous success in jobs was due to her drive and happy outlook. Patricia has a deep respect for family and commitment to the family staying together. She would be willing to put her own needs aside to contribute to the functioning of her family.

When asked the question about cultural values, Patricia said that she does not think about them much. She took the list of cultural values I prepared for the interview to read at home. She learned at a workshop that she may need to know what values are important to her for an interview.
Susan. Susan would like to work for a company that respects tradition. She thinks of traditional values as family values, treating people well and doing the extra bit to help their employees and customers. She had jobs with companies that were like that and she excelled in that environment. She described it like this: “I think we have just lost so much of that and there are so many people out there that just need – they need a smile, they need a hello. It’s the simplest thing and you know, make their day.”

On the other side of values identification, Susan also recognized how she changed with her life experience. She would choose creativity as an important value in her next career.

Creativity, cause I don’t think I like coloring inside the lines anymore, I don’t care what people think as much. I just don’t care so much anymore. I don’t care as much about what people think. It doesn’t bother me. I used to want everyone to like me, it was very important to me. Now it’s like yea, I’d like for you to like me but a whole bunch of people caring is not so important.

In the end, Susan describes an independent spirit as well as creativity.

Summary of emergent themes. The informants talked about values two times during the interview: without any prompting and with a direct question. Values were an essential element of the career decision-making experience. The bioecological spheres of human development as a conceptual framework was supported by the interview transcript. Further discussion of the themes within the bioecological spheres of human development appears in Chapter 5.

Subsidiary question 2: How does the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood affect the career decision-making experience of younger baby boom women?

• Would you say that you have ever thought about who you are based on your career?
Does your career create any thoughts about who you are within the community?

**Theme: Generativity.** Generativity was recognized as an adult task where the person strives to give to the next generation through productive work. Phrases in the transcript are noted that indicated thoughts, assumptions or opinions affecting work, family, or community and any goals that accompanied those responsibilities. Researchers believe that generativity applied to all generations (Stewart & Torges, 2006). The individual findings represent composite descriptions of what and how the women described generative influence on their career decision-making experience.

Table 6

*Generativity Representation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Generativity through career:</th>
<th>Non-career generativity</th>
<th>Relationship with important people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Generativity vs. stagnation (Erikson, 1959) and important relationships (Valliant, 1977)

**Donna.** Donna would not take a relocation or move out of town to search for employment due to remaining in the local area to be a care-giver for her father and mother. She also thought that she was a proficient role model for her nieces. Her job search was conducted with responsibility and drive.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly described volunteering and working with youth at her church. Kimberly wanted to remind all unemployed younger baby boomers to respect the younger workers. She learned this by working with the youth at her church. “I respect other people’s
thoughts, they are important. My pastor used to say ‘look at the big picture’ and you’ll see. I had to learn that too, that’s why I am saying this. I don’t know everything.”

Kimberly had a significant relationship with two adults that influenced her approach toward her career decision. The first was with her sister. “I think my generation, we were taught to stay. You have a job and you stay there.” But Kimberly benefitted from her younger sister’s encouragement to go to the classes offered from the community agency and college. Kimberly thought, “oh, I can’t do that” but her sister got her out of her “box” and thinking about what could be in her future. She talked to people and found out “what was going on in the world. My sister pushed me constantly, and I thank God that she did because I learned so much.” The second was her dad. As a younger person, Kimberly was influenced by him. Her previous work experiences are a result of his influence.

**Linda.** Linda’s previous work involved supervision of others. She said that when they learned that all jobs were phased out, she was more attentive to her staff’s relocation and search for employment than her own impending unemployment. She wants her future work to emphasize “servant leadership.” Linda valued work that will emphasize what she can do for others instead of work that values authority or money.

Linda has used the time out of work to explore other opportunities. A few of those opportunities reflect the Generativity tasks outside of an employment realm. She had numerous options for volunteer work and selected a few that benefit her community. She also was able to attend political and environmental presentations to enrich her perspective. Her previous employment would have stifled the thoughts of taking time during the day to hear from these officials on the topics.
Lisa. Lisa had a long career in human services which she attributes to her family values and career options open to women in the early 1980s. Her current career focus was different now due to a “bargain with God.” After Lisa and her husband recovered from cancer, Lisa began the steps for licensing for pastoral ministry. Even though she had felt a calling for a long time previous to this, she always delayed. Her thoughts, “wait a minute Lord, I have some things to do.” Her important relationship with her daughter and role in the home changed. “I raised my daughter.” Lisa was now free to “follow God into the ministry.” Lisa may complete the steps to ordination and work as a chaplain in a hospital or geriatric care facility.

Lisa also has an “accepting attitude.” She was comfortable working with all types of people. “It could be part of my faith journey, but I am not someone who would judge.” Over the years she has worked with homeless people, drug addicted people, people with HIV and Aids. She attributed this learning to aging. “I think this comes with age. Everyone has a story and everybody has a reason for where they are in life. Including me.” She was relaxed and laughing about her reflection on herself. The tension at the beginning of the interview had subsided.

Mary. Mary won’t plan to use her future work to do meaningful work for the community but would plan to be closer to her family and grandchildren by the freedom she gains from working part-time. She values helping her children as a primary assumption behind accepting any future work. She would want the freedom to work in a professional environment that offers flexible hours.

Michelle. Michelle, by definition, has selected work that will make a contribution to society. But Michelle was adamant that she did not make a decision to do this work. She is following God’s will. One passage explained Michelle’s understanding of her calling:
If I could just do what I want to do and not what I believe God is calling me to do; that I would actually like to do. I am not going the way that I would have chosen to go at this point in my life.

I know that it is from God and then, if I want to be obedient I move in that direction. God made it clear that there were plans in my life that he had for me and I needed to move on them. I realized it was time to be obedient and step forward in faith. I am assured that this is the direction God wants me to be in. And so there is no reason not to move in that path. And as long as I do my part, He’ll do His.

Sometimes when God leads people He doesn’t show you the entire picture and part of that is faith. You take this step not knowing exactly where you are going with it. So for me there is a couple of issues that are very clear: what I need to be doing; how he is going to use these things for his plan, is not as clear.

I am not going to worry about [how the certification applies out of state or out of the country] right now. Because it is where God chooses to go, I’m sure He’ll figure out the process.

I asked about the significant people in her family and the care-giving role she has fulfilled up until now. Michelle expected her youngest children to be independent learners and they would live with her and her husband, wherever that would be. Her husband would be retired by the time she completed her education and her children could complete their education through distance learning.

*Patricia.* Patricia has made her career choices in the past based on what her family needed her to do. She has taken jobs and quit jobs if they help her satisfy her homemaker role. Previously she did not question her husband’s involvement and she kept peace in the family by
going along. But this current career choice was full of emotion. Patricia would like to work with people and have a job that makes her happy. She would like to have less of a care-giving role. It would seem as if she is moving away from generativity tasks in her career.

Patricia was fulfilling tasks of generativity with her community. She was volunteering in the community. She was participating in the recycling program in the neighborhood. She was still significantly committed to managing the care-giving for her mother and her dependent son.

**Susan.** Susan was able to describe her next career. “I would definitely be working with people”. She stopped to think about who those people would be. “Maybe elderly, definitely working with people in a helping environment of some sort, something that makes people happy.” She also volunteered in the community and could fill all of her hours that way. She would like to volunteer exclusively after she retires. Susan’s relationship with her significant person would be her dad. She has accepted the care-giving role for her parents. It was the care-giving role that caused her to resign from one of her earlier jobs out of state.

**Summary of emergent themes.** Generativity could be analyzed as a polarity of responses. Most of the informants did not make career decisions related to perpetuating their influence on the world or future generations. Only four described some way that their career decisions related to generativity. Significantly, the women made career decisions based on the importance of another person in their life, which is a secondary but important alternative view on understanding generativity and human development (Valliant, 1977).

**Subsidiary question 3: How does womanhood affect the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women?”**
The interview protocol included specific questions to explore this aspect of the research question. By including this question in the protocol, the participant was defining which thoughts, assumptions, or opinions were related to her experience of being female.

- How does being female affect your career decisions while you are unemployed?
- What thoughts, assumptions, or opinions do you have that you think reflect being female?

Sorting the responses into thematic areas was completed by the researcher with specific parameters on each theme which are described with the theme. Quotes that were not reported earlier will appear in this section. Additional quotes may have been reported earlier but were repeated here due to their specificity. Table 7 indicates the thematic focus and whether that theme was expressed by each informant.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme#1 Gender based work</th>
<th>Theme#2 Gender and socialization</th>
<th>Theme#3 Relational focus</th>
<th>Theme#4 Feminism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Relational focus describes skilled communicators, caring, empathic, service oriented (Gilligan, 1982)

**Theme: Gender based work.** Four of the women thought of certain work as either appropriate for men or women. This was explicitly defined by the informant as part of the
interview. The source of the definition was not relevant to the theme, only the fact that the woman would decide if a career choice were appropriate by job tasks based on gender.

**Donna.** Donna was specific about taking any work that she would be qualified to accept. She had previously worked in jobs held more often by men and in fact, preferred them because the salary was better. She would not rule out any job based on gender appropriateness.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly would think about a job working in an office but would not work in certain environments. Jobs that were predominantly with male employees would not be acceptable because she had learned that the supervisor would ask for “favors.” She would be asked to do work that was not in the job description. “Based on—you know—I don’t do favors, I do my job. So if this is my job description, I will do it but if it’s not, I don’t do personal things. So never ask me to do anything personal.” She would not expect to socialize after work. “No playing games, I don’t see you after work. I go home.” She also would find a job that did not expect lifting or heavy physical work since men should be doing that work. “I’m a woman and I let them know I am a woman. So that I won’t lift a heavy box. If you want that heavy box lifted, you call the stock because that’s who is going to do it.”

**Lisa.** Lisa was getting licensed as a pastor in her church. She noticed that there is gender bias in the church. Some of the congregation have spoken up against having a woman in the pulpit. Within social service work, occasionally supervisors promoted candidates due to gender, either an especially attractive female or a male who had less credentials for a job.

**Susan.** Susan felt that she was treated differently in the work environment because she was female. “Being a woman, I have had issues with that beca
promotions as they were earned. As a way to describe how much better this was, Susan stated “I earned what the men earned!” Having pay equity contributed to her ability to save and now have some time to carefully consider her future.

**Theme: Gender and socialization.** Women are expected to interact in a certain way. The phrases included how women would interact individually and in teams in a workplace. Based on the descriptions, the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions would lead the informant to certain work environments or away from other types of environments. The answers also reflected how the participant may answer a question in an interview that would lead to finding a suitable employer match. Four of the women described characteristics that would be more commonly recognized as feminine.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly was socialized by her mother to be kind: “you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.” Because she felt that people gravitate to kindness, she would be courteous, kind, and help her team. Kimberly was effective as a team leader in her previous job. She smiled effortlessly and confided easily.

**Mary.** Mary was redecorating her house as part of her socialized role and expectations. She equates her home to reflect on her. In addition to making her home more marketable, she takes personal responsibility for how the home appears. “I want my surroundings to be nice, and to have all my own marking so to speak.” She would like to finish this project before she retires from the workplace.

**Michelle.** Michelle was following her church’s traditional family model. Michelle was the homemaker and completed all activities to keep the home tranquil. She educated the children, volunteered in her church, and ran the home. She did not expect to worry about finances or how bills were to be paid. “I have taken on the traditional woman roles. It is very
nice to go ‘gee, I am going to need money at the end of the month for such and such’ and then I don’t think about it again because it is his responsibility to see that those needs are met because I have so many other responsibilities. Being a woman has made an impact on my decisions.”

**Patricia.** Patricia was socialized to listen to men but not speak her mind. She held jobs in male dominated environments and would ignore their bantering. This communication method has carried over to her marriage and within jobs. She had gone to counseling but went without her husband because he would not go. The implication was that the problems were hers to fix. The interview included words like “fix myself,” “afraid to move forward,” and unresolved “issues.”

**Theme: Relational focus.** Women desire to be perceived as skilled communicators, caring, empathic, and service oriented (Gilligan, 1982). Women tend to seek work that satisfies the relational focus. Baby boom women would tend to step forward and assume the care-giving responsibilities of their family (Stewart & Torges, 2006). The collection of phrases emphasizes the range of thoughts, assumptions, and opinions consistent with service oriented careers. Four of the women explained career choice as a relational focus.

**Linda.** “When I think of being female, especially with a background in nursing, I think caring is an essential quality.” She wanted to continue to help others.

**Lisa.** Lisa went to college and contrasts the fact that women who went to college before her would only have been able to choose from education or nursing as a major. But she agreed that even though baby boomer women went to college, “I think those, I hate to say, those stereotypes went along with us.” Lisa originally trained to be a teacher but went into human services for her roughly 30 year career.
Mary. Mary chose her career in business but with a more relational focus initially. She was educated in fashion merchandising. Her next career will allow her to work part-time so that she can be available to assist with her grandchildren. She made her career choice based on an opinion that she would need to continue helping her grown children with their children.

Patricia. Patricia has assumed the roles that are traditionally female in the family. She is the primary care-giver and every job she had supported that primary role. She was struggling with this fact when we met. She would have liked to spend more time at work doing a job she enjoys but she felt that her care-giver role was not completely over. She thought she may have to delay entry to the job market to wait out when her son would be independent and her mother would no longer need her.

Theme: Feminism. The collection of phrases emphasize the need for equal rights in the workplace. The women described instances where they did not observe equal treatment or the manner that they would expect to be treated in the job. The thoughts, assumptions, or opinions described a set of criteria for the job or reflected identification with independence. All of the women addressed the need for equality in the workplace and projected how that would appear in their context of career decisions.

Kimberly. Kimberly described how she thought being female would be reflected in the work environment. Two very specific examples are quoted here:

“I’m proud to be a woman but if you think you are using me, I am going to use you back.” She laughed when she made this statement but there was a seriousness that she would know how to hold the line.

“I had a woman [supervisor] and like I am trying to help her out. And instead of her being grateful, she kinda like turned the tables on me and tried to make it mandatory.” This
statement emphasized that she had learned to do the work in the job description. In this instance, Kimberly requested a transfer to end the relationship with that female supervisor who had overstepped her bounds. Clearly, Kimberly thought that she might be pushed around if she were too feminine and her goal was to be independent and maintain boundaries in her job.

**Linda.** Linda has been investing so that she won’t be as vulnerable to the changes in retirement policy. “I better make sure I live within my means and put a little bit aside because I can’t depend on somebody taking care of me.” Linda was head of household.

**Lisa.** Lisa remembers when she was young and women did not work. Most times the father was the head of the household. She contrasts that to now: women in her age group are more liberated and, “we are independent, we can, you know, do our own thing. I don’t need a man. I can go out and do those things.” Lisa repeats this phrase, with a confident and strong voice.

**Mary.** Mary expected to have less trouble in the workplace because she was always independent. Her husband was often gone to work out of town so she learned to figure things out on her own. “I didn’t have a support system. I didn’t even have – back then we didn’t have computers to Google everything.” Her motto for her past and future was: “well you can cry in your milk or pick up your boot straps and figure out how to do this.”

**Michelle.** Michelle was looking forward to obtaining her training by the time her husband would be retired. She expected him to stay home once he is retired and she can go to work. “Because who wants to stay home if your husband retired.”

**Patricia.** Patricia thought she was ready to make some important changes in her future. “I have learned to just stick up for myself.” Patricia delayed taking an immediate job to attend
college classes for technology. This was an instance that illustrated how she was becoming more independent. Patricia was making some money by helping out a friend on Sundays.

“I made some money and a month ago I told him I was going to see our son.” She planned to fly to her son’s location and then drive back to Pennsylvania with him while he was on a break. “He said, ‘you can’t do that, we don’t have the money.’ Well, you know I am tired of putting stuff off. I worked hard for my $300 airplane ticket and I went and I bought the ticket. I came home one day and said I am going. I said sorry – and I am glad I did.” So even though Patricia apologized for her decision, she was demonstrating her independence through having money and a job.

**Susan.** Growing up, Susan was the only girl with five brothers. She was always the responsible one. Her mother would leave her in charge of the brothers even though she was not the oldest. She was reluctant to describe herself as independent.

Susan will eventually be the head of household if her future goes as she intends. She does not plan to marry a third time. “I think I am going to have to take care of myself for the rest of my life. I don’t have a problem with that. But that means I have to be self-sufficient. I tease my nephew about taking care of Aunt Susan when she is infirm.” She doesn’t plan to be dependent on anyone in the future until it is absolutely necessary.

When Susan described herself in relation to her future job, she would like the job to offer flexibility. “Treat me as an adult, experienced woman, that’s what I am.” She left this description to stand on its own without further explanation.

**Summary of emergent themes.** The textural and structural descriptions of the theme of feminism reflected a comprehensive definition of feminism. Generally, feminism is associated with equal rights. However, when the interview question probed how womanhood affected the
career decision-making experience a richer textural description provided details of what womanhood meant. The women equated their career as a form of independence due to style of decision making about themselves or their influence on others. Money was another way to exert independence through planning for self-sufficiency or independent thinking about expenses. Structural descriptions provided insight on how feminism would be experienced in the workplace or how feminist attitudes would influence work behavior.

**Subsidiary question 4:** What criteria do unemployed younger baby boom women use to evaluate or define vocational alternatives?

The interview protocol questions that explore this subsidiary question further are:

- Reflecting on the career lifeline, what things have you learned that you could use to make career decisions about your future career?
- Does it matter that you are in the younger baby boom generation making a career decision?
- Do you think intuition plays a role in your career decision? How?
- What about chance? How?
- What about other people’s opinion? If so, whose? Why?

Beyond the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions, the researcher explored other possible factors that played a role in the career making decision. Within the thematic hierarchy, a wide range of factors were described by the eight women. The additional questions enriched the breadth of the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about additional criteria impacting the career decision-making process.

Michelle did not acknowledge any additional factor other than God’s calling as the inspirational factor for her career decision. The audio recording for Donna lost the responses to
most of these interview questions. When asked for her feedback and corrections, Donna provided the clarification of answers for the central research question and first three subsidiary questions. For this reason, the sample size of the upcoming themes was reported as seven instead of eight.

Table 8

Criteria Used to Evaluate Career or Define Vocational Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Personal factors</th>
<th>Intuition</th>
<th>Chance</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Opinions of others</th>
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</table>

<sup>a</sup>Data not available for interview question, theme not evaluated for this participant

**Theme: Factors affecting career choice.** The interviews covered a wide range of factors that would affect the future career choice. The factors would become the context and decision triggers for career decisions (Amundson, 1995). This theme revealed the myriad of factors each of the eight women identified.

**Donna.** Donna previously chose her career because it offered a good salary with a strong company that had a significant presence in the community. The company was a leading force in building the local economy. Donna was looking for a job that would match her background. She was not considering a change of career choice. Donna’s father was a significant factor in her previous job searches. He did not categorize work as male or female. In fact, he coached her how to work in a male dominated environment. She won’t rule out any job for which she is qualified. She hoped to negotiate a salary that is not influenced by being female and Black. She
was cognizant of the tendency for women, especially Black women, to earn less in comparison to White males.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly hopes to avoid work that will be too physically or emotionally demanding. She was coached by her father to take work that was feminine, work that would be in a safe environment, and to do her job but not do favors. To avoid physical work, Kimberly ruled out caring for other people in a healthcare setting. She has used the employment center and completed the college training program on computer applications.

Kimberly completed practice interviews as part of the employment center program. “I went out and I practiced. I found out that’s a whole new world. I mean being from my part of the world and going out there again. Things are different. People don’t talk to each other like they used to.” Kimberly was learning how to use email to apply for jobs and do follow-up communication after an interview.

Kimberly also noticed the difference in interviewing. She had one example of a younger recruiter who conducted the interview. Because she was coached on how to manage a job interview, she was attentive to talking about only the details that were related to the job. But this particular recruiter wanted to talk about personal issues. “I’m like ok, I’m not here to be your mother. I’m trying to get a job. I’ll solve this problem for you but my question is, will you hire me?” When the interview was over, Kimberly decided the job was not for her. Whether or not they would offer her the job, Kimberly had decided against taking the job.

Kimberly closed this thought by saying that searching for a job and interviewing for a job are hard. It will be very difficult to get out and sell herself for the job. She did not have to go through any of those steps to get her previous job. Even when she had interviews for
promotions, “it was still in the building, and I knew them and they knew me. I find it very hard to talk about myself. Selling myself, basically, I find hard to do.”

**Linda.** Linda relied heavily on her sensible approach to making decisions as well as financial security. Since she left her job with a severance option, she was able to focus on her academic pursuit. “After my job loss, I was exploring what was out there. I wanted to see what was available, I was very open even if there was something different to do.” She did desire to use her 30 plus years of experience in some way though.

Linda plans to graduate in her mid-50s and her long view of the future includes work that is part-time, and possibly working remotely. She would consider work as a consultant or in a learning organization. Linda enrolled in the entrepreneur workshop because she recognized entrepreneurial abilities as also assisting in the field of consulting. She explained her personality as a way to understand her career choice.

Linda recognized that she leans toward an introverted, self-reflective style. “Not in the extreme because I balance a lot of different pieces. I love being out with people, but if there are a lot of challenging situations, I am not going to be recharged being in front of a hundred people.” Linda has been pragmatic about how stress would factor into her future job choice.

Linda survived cancer. “It was a surprise and total shock. Stress was a definite factor.” She was working toward a better balance of stress and adding more control in her career. She has come to some early decisions through reflection, decision making, and respecting her feelings even when she has to ignore distracting comments from others.

**Lisa.** Lisa worked in human services for her entire career. Now that she is looking for her next job, she found that her friends and former co-workers continue to refer her for jobs in the same field. She felt this was because she had a natural talent for the work, a natural affinity
to help others. “I’ve had a lot of friends who have encouraged me to continue down that path. You know, like ‘so and so is hiring, you would be good at that.’ That type of referral.” Lisa felt this was very reassuring and reinforced her idea of continuing to work in human services.

Lisa was also sensitive to the job interview process. She had interviews but no job offers. She thought one possible explanation for no offer was her short employment cycles with various employers. “I think that plays against me. I have quite a resume.” This last observation caused her to laugh uneasily. She was wary about how her resume may appear since previously she was well respected and had an executive director title. Lisa has begun to follow another career path.

Lisa explained that she “felt called to the ministry for about 30 years” but never acted on that career choice. She and her husband had cancer in 2013; his a very rare form that he was not expected to survive. She made “a bargain with God. If you would please keep us alive, I will follow you into the ministry. He kept His bargain so I guess I kept my part. We are both cancer free.” Lisa’s mood was completely changed at this point of the interview and she was very happy. The conversation flowed with the certainty of her choice and decisions made.

Mary. Mary had an employer and a job that she considered “underemployment.” Mary worked as support staff in an office but aspired to more. She enrolled in an accounting program to gain certification and a better position in the office. Her definition of a career discounted any work that was not professional or related to job training. She also delineated the definition differently since she was not the head of household. Her definition of career could include part-time work but only if it were related to her education.

Mary wanted to work in an office environment using skills that could be learned in a college certificate program. “I feel I like this type of work, some people find it boring, and it is to an extent. It doesn’t bother me. It’s tedious work, a lot.” But the new career won’t be
physical and she felt the work could continue as long as she was capable. She wants to continue to work part-time to be available for her grandchildren.

**Michelle.** Michelle did not choose her career. Her career was made apparent to her through a calling from God. She believed that she is choosing her career to satisfy what God wants her to do in her future. Faith was the key factor affecting her decision and trust in God. By spending time in prayer and having a very close relationship with God, Michelle discerned what her family’s future was meant to be.

For me, it is suddenly an overwhelming decision and thought in my head. And I know enough in my head to say ‘oh, is that you or is that me?’ because sometimes it is me and I just came up with an idea in my head. And through prayer and Bible study, and waiting, when it doesn’t go away and I keep feeling a confirmation, that this is where we need to go.

Michelle struggled with accepting the plan. She postponed beginning college for about a year. Michelle told me her plan would be more simple, more focused on a job that would sustain the family and allow them to enjoy some vacations or a nice car occasionally. She said she would be happy with taking a job at the local grocery store and working her way up to a manager position by the time her husband would be ready to retire. “I am not going the way I would have chosen to go at this point in my life.”

Michelle delayed beginning college, but that was the key factor toward getting started. The training program required an acceptance test. Due to her age, she was limited to applying to programs that could be completed by the time her youngest children are more independent. She believed it was too late for her to begin a program that required graduate school. She doesn’t have six or seven years to go to school.
**Patricia.** Patricia never purposely looked for a job in her past. With this next career choice, she intended to make it more of a project to make a career choice that she could live with for her future. “I want to do something the rest of my life that I enjoy. I don’t want to just get a job that I’m unhappy with. That’s my goal.” She invested time and research into this project.

Patricia had a notebook to keep track of what was in the newspaper and on websites. She was especially attentive to talking to people who had jobs that were interesting to her. She was pressured to do this research while still taking care of her son and mother. “It’s just little by little. I don’t have a whole lot of time. I keep trying to make time for myself. If it’s late at night I will pop on the computer and start looking.” Time and care-giving are two recurrent issues for Patricia.

Patricia was the designated parent to respond to medical emergencies in the family. Her husband worked in construction and would not be able to leave a job to assist their son. Two years ago, their son was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. During adolescence, adjustments to the medications and life-style required close monitoring. She was also the designated care-giver for her ailing mother. “I was always afraid of getting a job, what if something happens [to our son]? I need to have a job where it’s ok to leave in case something goes wrong.” She doesn’t fault the employers for this reality, but she was regretful that she may need to eliminate certain career options. She had some career aspirations to apply for flight attendant but was concerned that the schedule and inaccessibility would derail her plan.

Lately Patricia was getting some pressure from her husband to return to work. Her income was supplementing his $100,000 per year income. It provided for the extras, a better car, things for the kids, and occasionally things for Patricia. “I’m not a real material person; I’m not one of those girls who have seventy pairs of shoes or stuff like that.” The economy reduced her
husband’s earning potential and he asked when she planned to go back to work. Patricia resisted his pressure to go back and take a job that won’t satisfy her needs.

Her future work must also include working with people. This was one constant aspect to all of her former work. Patricia included additional criteria to narrow the choices. She would not want to work with numbers in the future; it would be too monotonous and repetitive. She liked sports and was enthusiastic about doing something related to sports. She could picture working for a sports team. “I love it because I want a job that isn’t the same every day. I want something that is different all of the time. I don’t want to do sales because I am not a good sales person. I would like to do promotions. And I am very good at organization, and fund raising.” She remembered times in the past when she did similar work for her son’s sports teams.

Her most recent ongoing experience was helping out a friend by managing a buffet a few hours each week. “It’s too physical for me.” Because she had this job, the physical aspect of any future job would be important to think about. She brought up the goal of working as a flight attendant again, but then said, “I’m kind of afraid of starting new things. Since I can’t physically do too much, I might not look into the flight attendant.”

As the interview progressed, Patricia was able to share two major influences that frame her career choice. The first was regarding her physical condition. She was recently told she needs more medical tests to check for health problems. She won’t begin a job without having a clean bill of health first. She wanted to begin a new phase of her career and hoped to stay with it for a longer period.

Patricia filed for divorce but never completed the process. The process overlapped with the time when their son was diagnosed with diabetes. When she met with her attorney, she was counseled to remain unemployed so that she would not be removed from the house with her son.
I still have that in the back of my mind.” Her husband’s influence was debilitating and undermined any work she did to become confident of her job choices.

It took years to just build myself back up. Because he sort of put me down a lot. No matter what job I would get, it would always be—it would never be “I’m happy for you.” It would always be, the first question out of his mouth “how much did you get? And how much do you expect to get paid? You can’t do that job.” It was always a letdown. So whenever I would work, I would be doing good. I would have to quit. It would be even harder for me because I would have to quit.

Patricia struggled to find the words to describe her husband’s influence on her career. Instead she illustrated the problem by detailing the way he would not help her manage the day-to-day pressures of caring for their sons. She had a number of examples to share. It was if her husband were purposely undermining her career. Therefore, Patricia had a deteriorating marriage to consider as a contextual factor in her career choice.

Susan. Susan determined that her future career may not make her a lot of money but her criteria for work has changed. “I want to do something that I feel good about, something that for me is giving back, and something that involves people. So it is more personal.” She knows how much money it will take to pay her bills and have a few small indulgences, but she is not looking for a corporate ladder track job. She accepted the idea that she may have to create an opportunity. She created one of her early jobs and that worked well for her. “It’s not that I’m thinking my life is almost over. I have another 30 plus years at least. But I want to do something I feel good about.”

After struggling with alcohol addiction, Susan does not seek high stress in the next job. “It was time to stop the alcohol. That’s the good news. I believe in God. There is a reason for
all of this.” Susan pushed herself to go beyond herself and sign up for the employment service classes and this interview. She felt like it was all part of God’s plan and even if she did not know the result yet, it would come. She recognized that she returned to the person she was about eight years ago (before the stress, failed marriage, parent’s illness). Now she felt like she could get hired for a job. For some time, she didn’t think she would even be hired to work in a grocery store. To accomplish a job search, Susan had to develop her self-esteem again.

Another factor that strongly influenced her career decision was her care-giving for her father. “My dad could live for another 10 years but I don’t know. I just see him kind of failing. But when he goes, there is nothing here for me.” Susan was at a crucial point in her life because she was thinking differently about her future. Susan was planning how to get her next 30 years off to a solid start. She determined it will be by working.

Susan needed to update her resume to begin looking for a job. She met with a human resources professional and they connected due to her extensive experience. That was when it became clear that her resume would need a significant revision. If she followed a chronological format, employers would be confused with her last experiences in food service and recent non-related jobs. “I am having a hard time because I have done so many things, wrapping them together in a way that my potential employer would see some benefit.” She wanted to rewrite her resume to emphasize work that develops from her creative inspiration and soul searching.

Summary of emergent themes. The composite description of the career decision-making experience broadened when the informants were not directed toward a certain factor. This theme was the result of the broad question as well as a wide view of analysis. Two of the eight women described interviewing experiences and how that experience led to additional details that had to
be considered. Five of the eight women reflected on the relationship of personal factors, like personality, to career choice.

**Theme: Intuition.** The term intuition was not defined in the interview question. Each participant reflected the meaning and significance of intuition as part of the career decision. Five of the seven informants recognized intuition once the interviewer requested to know more about how intuition affected career decision-making.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly defined intuition as something extra you put in after you have the main ingredients. She felt that intuition comes with age or taking responsibility for another person. Sometimes intuition could lead a person to miss an important part of the decision, so she recommended caution when using intuition. She believed a person could do more harm by using intuition. She did not say how it would affect her career decision-making.

**Linda.** Linda thought intuition was like a “gut reaction.” She had to rely on intuition in nursing for the duration of her career so she was not quick to dismiss the value of intuition. “But I never used it to not be open to other factors. But there is, sometimes you just feel in your gut that it is the right thing.” She has also seen that using intuition can drive her to be more cautious. Since she is naturally more of an introvert, she leans to more “process it in my mind a little more.” Intuition was a tool that slowed down the possibility of jumping on each new thing.

**Lisa.** Lisa believes that intuition could be at work in the career choice process. She also calls intuition “higher power.” This was a belief because “there have been things that have happened in my life that don’t just happen.” She recognized when intuition or the higher power were involved “because things just fall into place where things happen.”

**Mary.** Mary agreed intuition was important in her decision making.
Michelle. Michelle would not agree that intuition, chance, or any other person influenced her next career. She was following the calling from God, “God is control of all things.”

Patricia. Patricia shared a story of how intuition saved her from taking a job that would have caused her major heartache and personal failure. Patricia had a job offer from a job that was the answer to many of her problems. She would have had a significant amount of responsibility but she would have been paid well. The employer would have been a facility that provides care for the elderly and her mother could have moved into the facility. She was excited that she could have had her mother nearby and still retain her option to leave when her son needed her.

During the interviews, the questions had overtones that led Patricia to rethink how well this situation would have worked out for her and the family. Even though she went home and announced that she had a “marvelous job,” she refused the offer and faced her family. She read about the facility in the newspaper later and was thankful she did not take the job.

Summary of emergent themes. The women defined intuition as a “gut feeling, higher power”, and something extra you put into the decision before making a decision. Most of the informants thought of intuition as a feeling that would make decisions more correct. One of the informants thought intuition was a part of her personality and it caused her to be cautious, even helped her in performing her career in nursing more skillfully by following caution. Only one of the five informants described a detrimental effect of intuition. She felt that intuition could cause reluctance and that an opportunity would be missed due to the influence of intuition.

Theme: Chance. This question followed the intuition question and resonated with some participants more than others. This theme did not surface on its own; the interviewer had to ask
about the role of chance in the career decision-making experience. Three of the seven women spoke about how chance would affect their career decision making.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly was trying to be more aware of opportunities that are not planned. She was a planner, but her younger sister gave her a scenario. “My sister gave me a blank piece of paper and told me to work with it. I am learning how to work with a blank piece of paper and draw.” Kimberly was happy with the possibilities that could come from her new openness.

**Linda.** Linda agreed that chance could be a factor in a career. She suggested chance would be similar to “luck.” She provided this example: “People have gotten jobs and I say ‘huh?’ And other times a really strong individual gets passed over. I do think there is some element of luck. But that’s with life.”

**Lisa.** Lisa believed that happenstance could cause a series of events to occur and a job would result.

**Summary of emergent themes.** The composite theme summarized from the textural and structural descriptions confirms that to some extent chance can’t be ignored as a factor in career decision making. For one individual, chance conflicted with her religious beliefs because she thought that everything that happened was due to God’s plan. Further analysis on chance as a theme in career decision-making appears in Chapter 5.

**Theme: Identity.** This question was answered by seven of the eight women. It was significant and reflected on earlier in the interview as well as when the interview protocol addressed the variable. Only one of the participants denied that her identity would affect her career decision-making experience.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly thought her job did affect her thinking about herself. She thought she struggled in her job with balancing being kind and helpful and maintaining boundaries. She
would like to avoid a job that expects her to “overtax” herself. She could see a job as a source of “frustration” creating “anger and bitterness.”

I have always been confident in myself so that was never a problem for me but I found out that I don’t want to slip into pride. I want to be, confident is one thing, prideful is something else. I want to go in and be confident in what I am doing but I don’t want to be so prideful that I go in and hurt myself. So I’m thinking, teach myself how to have a balance in life.

Kimberly thought of her career as a part of her identity but did not want to be consumed by her job as the only facet of her life. She thought she could manage how much her career influenced all of her roles.

**Linda.** Linda felt that her career helped her to build pride, although she was specific to include that career is only one part of a person’s identity. She has always done the best she could in the circumstances and this helps in her current situation. Even though she was not working, she would not think of herself as having more problems than the younger applicants or classmates.

**Lisa.** Lisa connected her self-identity to her job. This thought was influenced by her parents’ jobs which she described as leadership positions. At the time of the interview, her self-esteem was low because she did not have a job title.

I’m not as good as I was when I had that title. That is something I keep to myself because I think it is kind of silly but that’s what I think. I think “maybe I am not as good as you because I don’t have that—I don’t have a nametag with a title.” I do find myself at times maybe not being envious but just hopeful or wishing that I was in that position. That I will get the chance to do that [have a position and title again].

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Lisa did not mention any effect of pride or pleasure from her service as a church minister. She did not classify that work as a career during the interview.

Mary. Mary felt that her identity had changed since she was more of a student and less of an employee. She benefitted by seeing that she was more of a learner and felt excited by the new things she was learning. She wanted this learning experience so she could assume more professional work responsibilities when her certification is done.

Patricia. Patricia benefitted from contributing to the household income when she did work. She was able to help the family pay for some extras and she did not overburden the family by taking out for extravagant purchases for herself. Her recent trip to see her son sounded like one of the few occasions when she took money she earned to do something she would enjoy.

Patricia mentioned that our interview seemed like counseling so when the time came for this specific question, the researcher moved on based on the previous conversations. The meaning of the question was available through her earlier answers.

Susan. Susan had gone through a number of changes due to her career changes and personal life. She was at the top of a corporate ladder with an excellent salary, “paid as well as the men,” and then resigned to work on significant relationships. Most notably, Susan was traveling between states to be with her mother before she died and now she lives with her father. She was still married but separated. Even that part of her identity was a façade. She wanted other men to believe she was still in a relationship because she was not ready to be in a new relationship. This was all related to her career decision-making process. Her identity was still adjusting to what she pictures for her future and what God has planned.

Summary of emergent themes. Seven informants contributed their thoughts, assumptions and opinions on this theme. One disqualified herself from the question because her
identity was not tied to her career but on God’s calling. Of the six who remained, all acknowledged that career was significant. Three of those six included other parts of their lives when defining self-identity. For instance, the role of student greatly enhanced Mary’s self-identity and future prospects of career choices due to accepting the need for additional education. Three of the women were vulnerable because their lack of job title or certainty about the future career caused distress. This was evident from the words as well as the non-verbal communication. Two of the women who connected their identity to the career and additional roles were positive and less stressed.

**Theme: Influence of others.** Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological theory acknowledged the influence of persons through the proximal process of the microsystem. The interview protocol requested this information explicitly for clarity of data collection. The findings are references to current influences of others on the career decision-making experience.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly was living with her younger sister. During the interview, she described how her younger sister has helped her to see how work was viewed by younger people. Her sister also gave her an alternative way to think about younger people in the workplace.

**Linda.** Linda met periodically with friends who were also making career changes during late middle age. She has learned how she is different and reflected on the ways the group helps each other. Linda had uncles who questioned her use of this time and wondered why she wasn’t looking for a job immediately after her job ended. She learned to think more positively, learn from what is helpful, and dismiss the rest.

**Lisa.** Lisa kept in touch with her network of associates in human services to keep up to date with what was happening in the county. She also had a group of friends encouraging her to
continue the licensing process for pastoral ministry. Her friends have suggested she work as a chaplain in the future.

**Mary.** Mary gave a few examples of ways that her family have helped her to think about learning technology. She was able to step forward and help one of the CPAs at work with a problem he was having and this was because her daughter impressed on her that she can get any information she needed from the internet.

**Patricia.** Patricia has been a caregiver for her family, including her biological family, for a long period of time. She has gotten jobs because her network values her as a hard worker, a happy person, and responsible.

**Summary of emergent themes.** Five of seven informants named people who influenced their career decision-making experience. By far, family members such as sisters, husbands, and relatives mostly gave positive direction and clarity in the career decision-making process. Friends were second to family as influential forces on the career decision-making experience. In one case, the husband was a negative factor and possibly the source for stalled decision-making.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the detailed descriptions of thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about career decisions made by eight unemployed younger baby boom women. The thoughts, assumptions, and opinions were triggered by exploratory research questions, specifically the central research question and four subsidiary questions. Those research questions generated a detailed account of the experience of career decision-making by unemployed younger baby boom women.

Prior to completing the data exploration, the researcher reviewed her reflective journal to bracket prior assumptions. The analytic approach followed the steps outlined by Smith et al.
The recursive process involved reading the transcripts and listening to the recordings to complete initial noting. Those notes formed a framework which was refined and reconfigured after noting was completed for all eight transcripts.

The researcher attended to the fact that the themes were reflected in the original transcript and not a response to her own research agenda. Using editing tools in the word processing software assured that themes and sections of the transcripts were included based on accuracy. The search and find tool was not likely to omit sections or forget about a section of a transcript. Tables were constructed to determine the frequency of themes from the analysis of the transcripts.

The report of the findings concentrated on the exact phrases of the women to develop textural and structural descriptions of the theme. The findings presented a description of what the career decision-making experience was like and how the experience happened (Creswell, 2013). The composite description was defined in the emergent themes as the first part of the recursive analysis. The composite descriptions answered the central research question and subsidiary research questions. Chapter 5 presents the themes in light of the conceptual framework and continues the process of the hermeneutic analysis.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The number of women between the ages of 55 and 64 in the labor market in 2022 is expected to rise substantially, almost as large of a participation rate as the men in the same age range (Toossi, 2013). At the same time, the workers in the oldest age ranges outnumber the workers at the younger ranges, contributing to the aging of the workforce in the United States (Toossi, 2013). The cohort of workers contributing to the aging of the workforce is called the baby boom generation. The last surge of the baby boom generation is known as the younger baby boom generation, born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964. The research findings of this study address the career decision-making experiences of unemployed younger baby boom women. Younger baby boom women are changing history and the career trajectory of late middle age women.

Women tend to earn less than men, even in the same occupations. Pew Research estimates that women earn 84 percent of what men earn (Patten, 2015). This is one of the obstacles women face when saving for retirement, which is a key objective later in one’s working years. Women, especially women currently between 51 and 61 years of age, had interrupted work histories. Mothers tend to take a career interruption to care for family (Patten, 2015). A career interruption, such as a mother who takes a particular job to accommodate the chronic illness of a child, could be a result of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), life role (Super, 1957), or cognitive –person variables (Lent et al., 2000).

Unemployment in the middle age years has been scrutinized by economists as well as social scientists. Since 2001, a heightened awareness of the changing labor market means that most employees are aware that a lay off or company relocation can be worrying. Older workers
are usually out of work for longer periods than younger workers (Rix, 2001). Age discrimination, lack of technology skills, and shifting occupational needs contribute to the delay of reentering the labor force (Pynoos & Liebig, 2009). Older workers worry that they will be part of the statistics of those lingering on unemployment.

This study accepted what has already been well established by this body of research: large numbers of late middle age women will work and delay retirement; women earn less over their lifetime, which means they have less money saved for retirement; and unemployed, late middle age employees struggle to reenter the work force. There are a number of career counseling models to explain career decision-making. This study set out to understand what it would be like to be an unemployed younger baby boom woman making career decisions.

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and understand the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women. Generational research examines factors related to historical, cultural, and economic significance (Alwin et al., 2006; Mannheim, 1952). More frequently career research addressed questions related to younger populations or those who are college educated. Recent career research has begun to recognize the need for a subjective understanding of the career decision-making experience. The present research has examined the subjective understanding of career decision-making for unemployed women in late middle age. The findings from this research provide a detailed account of career decision-making through the lenses of these women, including the perceived rewards, challenges, and truths about unemployment in late middle age. Each of the women identified career alternatives that would satisfy their individual characteristics and broad life circumstances.
Discussion of the Findings

Results: Central Research Question

The central research question of the study was: How do the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of unemployed younger baby boom women affect their career decision-making experience? The four themes that emerged from the data sorted thoughts, assumptions, and opinions stated by the informants. The themes address a gap in the literature on the topic of career development of late middle age women—specifically, the factors that impact career decision making in unemployed younger baby boom women. The central research question generated data recognized as experiential material that could be analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 2014).

Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. In order to complete the iterative and recursive cycle of hermeneutic analysis, the researcher applied the five lived existentials to fully understand the silent themes from the women’s narratives (van Manen, 2014). The five lived existentials are: relationality, corporeality, spatiality, temporality, and materiality (van Manen, 2009, 2014). Corporeality was expressed in the earlier analysis of themes as a “fundamental motif of [their] understanding of human phenomena” (van Manen, 2014, p. 304). Spatiality was not discerned by the researcher to apply to the hermeneutic analysis of this study. Spatiality referred to the experience of space in relation to the experience (van Manen, 2014). Since the central research question explored the cognitive aspects of the career decision-making experience, the experience of space was not revealed in the transcripts.

Unemployment as a period of preparation. All eight of the woman interviewed for this study were using this time to prepare for their next career move, such as exploring new career options, retraining to begin a new career, settling personal issues that were conflicting
with employment, or seeking the best possible match of a job at the best possible wage (i.e. frictional unemployment). Frictional unemployment exists because workers are seeking the best match of a job for their skills at the best possible wage. More than half of the sample viewed unemployment as a productive period. Frequent words that were used included “busy,” “freedom,” and “God’s plan.” The majority of the women wanted to clarify that their unemployment was not a time to “sit on the couch and eat bonbons” (Linda). To a lesser extent unemployment created worry and doubts about the future.

Meaning of unemployment and lived existentials. The women expressed relationality by the way that they were connected to family members to make career decisions. Most frequently the women made career decisions based on their relationship with their family, even to the point of renewing a relationship by moving in with an aging parent or younger sibling. The relationship could be supportive—like the relationship with the sibling to the younger baby boom woman (Kimberly)—or unsupportive, like the relationship between the husband and the younger baby boom woman (Patricia). The themes central to the temporality of unemployment address the difference between subjective and objective time while unemployed. Many were willing to use the time to overcome some obstacle to making a career decision. They were willing to retrain, participate in practice interviews, and even wait for children to grow into young adults to pursue their career. A minority addressed the idea of using time frivolously while unemployed. They were concerned that objective time would signal a less earnest desire to return to work.

Career aspirations. Making a career decision typically culminates in an action (Amundson, 1995). The majority of the themes corresponded with existing research on women’s career decision making. Women are typically oriented toward relational decision making
(Gilligan, 1982). In this study, family relationships were the central relationship affecting career choice. Evidence was also provided that family responsibilities, gender role orientation, and employment inequities affect women’s career decision making (Coogan & Chen, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2008). The women in this study reflected on the family affecting location of the work, number of hours worked, and type of work. Previous beliefs about acceptable work for women affected their future decisions about acceptable work.

Each participant did plan to do something about a career, but there was significant variety in the responses regarding what those specific plans entailed. A few were looking at a long term result, subject to completing a retraining program at a college or university. These were the women who invested a commitment to education and planning. The motivation behind the plan varied from belief in God’s plan to intrinsic value of learning. The career aspiration took a variety of forms from very specific to more general. There did not seem to be a pattern to the manner of making the plan.

More brain, less brawn. Due to their age, several women decided it was time to take a less physical job and use their brain power. Most of the women who believed this, opted to retrain for their change of career (Lent et al., 2000). The career retraining involved free workshops and seminars, tuition waivers for unemployed workers, and college or university programs. Three of the eight women expect to change fields to enter a field that is less physical.

Do “good” through work. Three of the eight women would like their work to help others. Women who thought this would influence their career direction appeared to be taking on the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation (Erikson, 1959) through their career decision making process. Traditionally, women have been expected to work in fields that required skilled communication and care-giving (Gilligan, 1982; Thorndike, 1911). It could be
argued that the women were following gender stereotypes and reverting to earlier generational expectations of women’s work (Osipow, 1975). When the younger baby boom women began their careers, in general, most females assumed jobs in education or nursing (Gottfredson, 1981).

**Career aspirations and lived existentials.** The women made career decisions that reflected relationality. Most were influenced to work in some way with others, either in direct service as educators, ministers, or in health care. Several wanted to influence their relatives by their chosen career path and how they incorporated their future work. For example, by working in a certain field, the work hours would accommodate providing childcare for grandchildren. This helped to support the adult children and provided a chance to influence the youngest of the progeny. Career training involved the existential theme of temporality in an objective manner for a number of the women. The length of training required to enter a certain occupation excluded career options. Temporality was reflected in the subjective experience of time related to the generations. The women in this study distinguished how their adolescence and young adult period differed greatly from the current generation. Because of the historical experiences of each generation, the culture and values that contributed to the essential meaning of work and communication were different for each group. The existential theme of materiality had less significance toward the career decision-making experience than the two previous lived existentials. When the women spoke of things and the influence of those things, they were more concerned with maintaining their current lifestyle. Raising the standard of living or acquisitions was not a central focus of this experience. Simply, the women were not looking to earn more money to add possessions to their assets or increase their material worth.

**Digital natives.** More than half of the women expected to utilize technology in some way in their future career. The women thought they were behind in some way because they
“didn’t grow up with technology” (Linda). Whether the women learned this information from personal experience or from some other research, their experience reflected what was in the literature. Technology was one of the most prominent differences between generations cited by employers (Godshalk, 2006; Pitt-Catsouphes, 2012).

Technology influences the manner of communication as well. To a lesser extent but still noteworthy, a few of the women thought they would need to learn to communicate in a different manner since technology has affected most communications, including job search etiquette. Several had attended free workshops on computer software applications and another group of women participated in free workshops on current job search strategies.

**Digital natives and lived existentials.** The existential theme of relationality appears as the younger baby boom women were describing their lack of technological skills and the fact that younger workers are more sophisticated users of technology. Communication by digital natives differed greatly from the younger baby boom women. Specific examples included level of self-disclosure and attention to devices as opposed to those in the workplace. The theme of temporality arose as a response to the amount of time needed to perform certain operations with technology. In the example of the woman who was in computer class, she felt that she was delaying the entire class due to her inexperience but she may have benefitted all the learners no matter what age due to learning new information (Kimberly). Materiality includes how things are experienced, as well as technology. While not central to the discussion of materiality, there appeared to be a silent theme related to the acquisition of technological devices. The younger baby boom women were less likely to acquire the newest technological device or to operate new software in a work environment.
Age discrimination. The study extended prior research on age discrimination in hiring practices of employers (Pynoos & Liebig, 2009). Even with laws prohibiting discrimination, many of the women were concerned about how their age or appearance would jeopardize their employment options. The majority of the women had worked up until recently and were aware of the reality of the workplace. They had experiences or heard stories of discrimination which formed their impression. Researchers have found that late middle age employees are unemployed longer and one explanation was age discrimination (Pynoos & Liebig, 2009). One statement from the interviews captured this sentiment well: “Now, at my age, I don’t know how many opportunities there really are around” (Susan).

Age discrimination and appearances were the most difficult to personally manage but the women found ways to control the circumstances. Most agreed that they would leverage their years of experience as a way to obtain a job over a younger, less experienced applicant. “I’m not 30 years old with a perfect figure and all—but if that’s what somebody is looking for in that job, well that’s not for me anyway” (Linda).

Age discrimination and lived existentials. The existential theme of relationality addressed the concern that the younger baby boom women thought they would be treated differently due to their age. When possible, the stereotypical influence of age on others (e.g., ambitious, slow to change) would be deflected by presenting a more acceptable version of the self. The women were generally skilled at describing how their extensive experience would benefit others in the work environment. The existential theme of temporality was expressed by the fact that the women could identify fears or concerns that crossed the age paradigm. For example, the woman who struggled with math found that math could be a problem for younger students in her cohort of learners (Linda). Learning was not confined to one age group but could
be achieved by all. Length of time on the task was more relevant than the age of the individual. Materiality was not connected to the experience of the younger baby boom women as described during their interview.

**Results: Subsidiary Question #1**

The first subsidiary question was how do the bioecological spheres of human development affect the career decision-making experiences of younger baby boom women? The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) of human development consists of nested systems that consider the interaction of the individual and the hierarchy of systems. Investigating phenomena and experiences considers the interaction of the multiple systems. The multiple systems, called proximal processes, are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The interview protocol included questions that were based on the understanding of the proximal processes, especially the macrosystem as it influenced continuity or change.

To understand the related themes of the subsidiary question, the researcher sorted the significant phrases into a hierarchy of themes. Those themes were presented in Chapter 4. Women in the study based their career decisions on systems represented in the bioecological spheres. Thoughts, assumptions, and opinions demonstrating family environment influence were attributed to the microsystem. The mesosystem links the elements in the microsystem by an unrelated element in the immediate environment. The last two levels of the systems are exosystem or the community and neighborhood influence on the individual; and the macrosystem which refers to the broad cultural values and patterns of ideology influencing all levels of systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

**Microsystem influence on career decision.** The microsystem is the immediate external environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). All of the women commented on the influence of family
values regarding their career choices. Family values are reinforced in the family interaction with the individual. The model works particularly well to describe the influence of family history.

**Younger baby boom and family values.** When the women thought about unemployment and their generation, they referred to family values. They recalled the family values instilled while growing up, traditional values like work ethic. Their parents modeled work ethic. Parents taught their children that hard work would lead to a better life (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007). Work ethic was mentioned by more women than any other value. Closely related to work ethic and mentioned nearly as often were values like responsibility, fairness, and faith in God.

The value of education was discussed during the timeline exercise by a few of the women. Some of those women were encouraged to attend post-secondary education, but thought they would not need the training once they were married and had a family. All of the women were high school graduates and the majority had post-secondary certificates or degrees. Their education attainment was consistent with the literature on the younger baby boom generation. Younger baby boom adults completed education at higher rates than previous generations (Eggebeen & Stugeon, 2006; Whitbourne & Willis, 2006).

Education was valued as a mechanism to improve job skills by seven of the women. They decided to attend workshops or formal education as post-secondary options. The most frequent choice for education was individual courses or workshops on technology. Education was also reinforced as a means to a better standard of living. The women displayed a commitment to education that made them favorable contenders in the job market (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Fishman, 2010; Pitt-Catsoupes et al., 2012).

Looking back at an earlier time, the women remembered when they made their career decisions based on their plan to have a family. When those women graduated from high school
they thought work would be a temporary arrangement until the more serious work began of raising a family. The influence of the family microsystem affected their early career choices and patterns. One of the women in the sample went so far as to say that she had a less serious career until she realized that she would not have children (Susan).

Four women were mothers and two of them had dependent children. The commitment to family continued to influence their choice of career; they have delayed career decisions to wait until the dependent children were grown and independent. Another mother, who is now a grandmother, stated that she would work flexible hours to care for grandchildren. Considering family as part of the career decision was another example of the microsystem influence. The theme of family influence resonates with subsidiary question four also.

**Macrosystem influence on career decision.** The macrosystem guides all other systems. The macrosystem includes culture and how the culture influences individual lives. The women explained the ways that the culture influenced their career decisions.

**Economics and the labor market.** The macrosystem known as the economy prompted four of the seven women to discuss how frictional unemployment affected them. Frictional unemployment occurred when a person did not accept a job immediately because they would wait for a better opportunity that matched their level of skills and also provided a better wage. Each of the women used the unemployment time as preparation for reentry into the workforce at a wage that would sustain her standard of living until she retired. A common phrase among the interviews was “making enough to pay the bills and set a little bit aside for later.” Appropriate jobs and wages depended on each person’s projected tenure of employment. For instance, one of the women expects to work five years until she is eligible for social security and another expects that she could work 30 years more if she found the right employment.
Eligibility for social security benefits. Three of the eight women would not ever be eligible for social security due to lack of work that paid into the social security system. The remaining five women either assumed diminishing benefits predicted a continuing need for employment beyond the age at which social security benefits begin or they expressed dissatisfaction with the system as a future source of retirement benefits. Two examples of the contrasting assumptions follow.

Well I was aware of age 67 because I complained about it years ago: “it’s not fair, I’m paying into the system and there won’t be anything left for me.” And maybe that helped me at this point because between knowing that they increased the social security age and that being at the end of the baby boomers, just the laws of supply and demand in population age groups, it may be there’s nothing left in future government funds (Linda).

Well, I know I am not counting on Social Security to get me through, certainly. And luckily, while I was at my human resources job, I was paid very well toward the end and I had good benefits so I have a nice 401K. Um I have, I sold some of the stock and put it into investments, I don’t have enough money to retire now but I am not going to live on just social security. I don’t – if it is there great, but I am not counting on it (Susan).

The macrosystem that was meant to supply income for individuals upon retirement has changed as the younger baby boom employee approaches eligibility. As the supply could not be projected to meet future demand, social policy has changed eligibility requirements. The younger baby boom employees are on the cusp of the phasing in eligibility policy changes (Dohm, 2000). The sample included women from both extremes of the birth years. One of the older women could retire in five years and felt comfortable with collecting benefits. The
youngest of the generation knew that full eligibility for benefits began at age 67, but they were skeptical that the benefits would be adequate for all eligible retirees.

**Mixing the generations in the workplace.** Three of the eight women commented on membership in the younger baby boom generation and how that group membership affected their career decision-making experience. As such, with this sample, it was not a major theme but those who did explain a relationship found a great deal to say about this topic.

Three women described the mismatch between the generations in the workplace. Using the bioecological model, the mismatch between the generations has to do with the macrosystem. The macrosystem of the younger baby boom generation created certain expectations about work behavior, communication, and respect for fellow workers. As described in the literature, the younger baby boom employee respects work rules, work methods, and in general, the concept that younger employees must pay their dues to work their way up the ladder. The baby boom employee may want to describe younger workers as lazy, non-communicative, or disrespectful (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007).

When I was doing practice interviews, they don’t want what I have to offer. They want quantity, not quality. And I was not trained for just quantity. I was trained for quality, see, quality was first, then came quantity. But in this one it is quantity and all the other things, then it is quality. So I find that the language is different and to go out and see what they want, it’s very hard because to them I am old fashioned and I am not up to date. (Kimberly)

In the Kimberly’s case, her opinion was formed during her previous work history and confirmed during practice interviews. Managers receive guidance from human resource
literature written to bridge the generation gap due to the tendency for generations to misunderstand each other in the work environment (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007).

**Risks factors in the environment.** Risks and protective factors are present in the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Risk factors prevent human development and appear at various levels of the systems. Analyzing the interview findings with the lens of risk factors helps to understand two risk factors that surfaced during study.

- One of the women lacked clarity in her career decision making. She had suggested alternatives but did not commit to an action. Her decision-making process was stalled. As her trust developed during the interview, she revealed that her husband disparaged her career choices and ability to earn income. She was concerned also for her son’s health. She worried that she would not be available for health emergencies if she pursued her dream job. Her risk factors were present in her family microsystem.

- Only a few of the women had recent job interview experience to talk about during the data collection interviews. Lisa described an experience during her job interviews. Lisa was not hired for a job and a younger, recent college graduate was hired for the job. Lisa’s colleagues, who worked in her field, reported that she did not get the job because they knew that the employer assumed that she would not accept the salary. The employer believed the experienced younger baby boom candidate would be too expensive to hire. This example reveals the risk factor interaction of the exosystem. The risk factor indirectly affected the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and played an important role in removing a career option for the informant.
Results: Subsidiary Question #2

The findings for the second subsidiary question answer the question: How does the psychosocial crisis of generativity vs. stagnation in adulthood affect the career decision-making experience of younger baby boom women? Generativity involves “generation of new beings as well as of new products and new ideas, including a kind of self-generation concerned with further identity development” (Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997, p. 67). At this stage there is a greater commitment to “take care of the persons, the products, and the ideas one has learned to care for” (p. 67). Family and community are central to the caring relationships and generativity. Erikson (1959) acknowledged that people in their 60s who were not parents would search for alternative ways to satisfy the generativity stage of development. The majority of the women were not parents. They planned to meet the generativity task by caring for aging parents or others through community work.

Generativity is also the act of creating a new identity or revising an identity that was constructed during adolescence when previous questions were answered. Erikson, E. H. and Erikson (1997) suggest that aging could cause confusion about “status and role.” Referring to the continuous identity development that began in adolescence, the questions one ponders include: “How independent can you afford to be?” and “Who are you at 85 and beyond, when compared with who you were at midlife?” (p. 110). Erikson, E. H. and Erikson suggest that identity revisions are more confusing than identity formation as an adolescent. Identity revision was one of the emergent themes supporting the literature. Three of the women commented on the distress caused by stepping down from an executive position or by lacking a definite career identity.
The findings addressing this research question supported the desire to connect career to the generative tasks of late middle age. Half of the women spoke at length on how caring for others affected their career decision-making process. They chose to postpone or adjust career aspirations based on caring for others. Of that group of four, three are beginning to care for themselves as part of the career decision-making process. The fact that more women expected to work beyond age 65 may be a recent shift in the labor market, but as a stage of human development, the desire to be generative rather than stagnant was driving career decisions.

**Results: Subsidiary Question #3**

The third question was how does womanhood affect the career decision-making experience of unemployed younger baby boom women? Previous literature focused on younger women and their career choices (McCracken & Weitzman, 1997; Whitmarsh & Wentworth, 2012). That research suggested women were making subtle changes in career choice by selecting less traditional career fields. Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields are included in those less traditional career fields and offer career opportunity (Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011-12). The women in the present study were likely to select a career in traditional fields such as social services, education, or administrative support. Finding role models in STEM careers often influences career choice in that direction (Quimby & DeSantis, 2006). There was no evidence of role modeling available to the women in the present study.

Half of the sample spoke about previous influence of stereotypes formed during early career development. Fathers were the most frequent influence of reinforcing stereotypes of what constituted women’s work or men’s work. This supports Gottfredson’s (1981) theory of career
choice. The women were likely to continue believing gender influenced career choice; with only three of the eight challenging the socially accepted gender role related to work.

Super’s life-span, life-space theory was reflected in themes of gender and socialized role expectations (Super, 1957). Half of the participants affirmed that acting female required a certain workplace role as well as work choice. Women were expected to be skilled communicators and ideal for the team environment. This thought reflects the relational approach preferred by women (Gilligan, 1993). However, there were a few women who felt more comfortable in stepping outside that role to be assertive communicators and set parameters on future job expectations, for instance, “I’m not here to be your mother. I’m trying to get a job.” (Kimberly). The informant does not want to blur the line between work and personal communication. The women also spoke of their career as a road to independence. They were seeking to be more independent in order to take control of their domestic choices or they were the head of household and knew the need for financial security.

**Results: Subsidiary Question #4**

What criteria do unemployed younger baby boom women use to evaluate or define vocational alternatives? The fourth subsidiary question was most like the central research question as an exploratory question. The informants were free to emphasize factors that were most influential on the career decision-making process (Cohen et al., 2004; Lent et al., 2000; Stead et al., 2012). Additional prompts gathered more information about specific factors like intuition, chance, and identity influence on career decision-making. These additional questions reflected career decision-making research in the recent decade (Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997; Krumboltz, 2009).
Personal factors. To fully understand career decision making, Amundson (1995) emphasizes determining the context and decision triggers of rational career decision-making techniques. Each of the women expounded various personal factors. Those factors formed a diverse range of context and decision triggers. After family, personality, physical and emotional health, workplace environment, and calling from God were named most frequently compared to other personal factors that contributed to career choice. This particular interview question produced a rich variety of individual factors considered during career decision-making.

Intuition. When prompted, the majority of the women were candid about the way intuition would factor in future career decision-making. Some described it as a feeling and others perceived it as a force that guided decisions. There were even instances where using intuition previously spared the informant from making a detrimental decision. All expressed the need to have intuition as a guide and only one felt that intuition would negatively influence a decision.

Chance. Of the various career choice theories, Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 2009) was discussed the least of all the career choice possibilities. The women described the need to consider life-role, doing good through work, and how certain types of work suited their personality preferences (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997; Super, 1957). The influence of chance on career decision-making was expressed by only three of the women. Chance may be least controlled by the individual therefore it did not readily come to mind.

The perception of chance affecting career decision making could be summarized by one informant’s example of how at times a job offer does come down to “luck” (Linda). The women did not experience career counseling or career guidance by way of the method described by the
Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT). Those who are guided by HLT would seek to produce unplanned actions which create new options (Krumboltz, 2009).

**Identity.** Of the factors highlighted here that reflect emerging career theory, identity was most likely to affect a career decision. This topic surfaced earlier in the discussion of psychosocial development and generativity (Erikson, 1959; Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997). Identity as it is meant here, adds additional depth to the theme. The informants described their identity as improved due to seeking a new career that better met their expectations and goals. A few felt that their identity suffered as a result of decreased expectations for future work and goals. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) posits that the individual and their own variables interact with the environment and influence the path of career development (Lent et al., 2000). The informants consistently acknowledged thoughts about self-identity as a factor in career decision making.

Consistent with the theme of identity, one individual addressed the subject of accepting racial identity in her job search as a late middle age adult compared to earlier job searches. Donna was one of two African American women in the sample, but she expressed race salience (Cross, 1991). The concept of race salience is the importance that race plays in a person’s life; a way to organize thoughts around race. Donna experienced racial stereotyping based on her appearance (she wears her hair in dreadlocks), and she was confident that she wanted to manage the impact of stereotypes on influencing job offers. If appearances could be mitigated, she would take that alternative. “I still have to make changes to modify my dreads so not to be rejected for positions” (Donna).

**Opinions of others.** The last influential factor named by the women was the influence of others on the career decision-making process. Family and friends were the most frequent
influences on the informants. The type of influence could be negative or positive, but in most cases, the person was recognized as a motivating influence. One informant stated that her husband’s negative comments and expectations were stalling her career decision-making progress.

**Summary of Key Findings**

In Chapter 4, the themes were organized according to the research question. Frequency of the distributions and direct quotes were provided to assure trustworthiness of the study, and the presentation of the actual interview excerpts were intended to contribute to a rich understanding of the informants’ individual characteristics and broad life circumstances. Key findings suggested that the women’s various perceptions of rewards, challenges, and truths emerged from the qualitative study. They can be summarized as follows:

- The women in the study were unemployed because their job no longer existed or because they terminated employment. The cause of the unemployment may surface later in the career decision-making process.

- Unemployment represented a time for preparation for future career aspirations and planning future life goals. The women cited generative goals influencing career choice. Work might be conceived as an opportunity to care for others and/or an opportunity to care for self. Life goals considered the influence of important people such as an aging parent or dependent child. The women thought caring was a characteristic of womanhood.

- If financial stress occurred as a result of unemployment, the woman focused on reentry to the field or a closely related field with as little time out of work as possible.
• Even into late middle age, these women continue to have family needs influencing career choice. The women who are not parents respond to extended family needs.

• Participants consistently ranked lack of computer skills as a deficit in the labor market. Programs that offer training can remove barriers for non-digital natives.

• Age and racial discrimination still exist despite laws created to protect job applicants. Self-identity was expressed by degree of comfort acknowledging the influence of discrimination on an application/interview.

• The lived existentials were evident in the experience of the younger baby boom women’s career decision-making experience. Relationships, time, and material/technological themes appeared throughout the interviews when reflecting on the experience of career decision-making, even if sometimes as silent themes rather than explicitly shared. Temporality may limit some experiences to a specific experience of a specific generation.

• These younger baby boom women believe that generational characteristics benefit employers. Generational characteristics include work ethic and communication skills. The women intend to parlay the years of experience as an asset over younger candidates.

• Career served as a way for many of the participants to answer a purpose in life or a religious calling to follow a goal based on faith.

• These younger baby boom women are at ease with working more years prior to retirement. Good health and longevity drive the positive attitude more than the necessity to work. The changes in social security law were only discussed after prompting from the interviewer.

• Economics and job opportunity were no concern or, if problematic, could be managed by widening the job search regionally.
• These women intended to work as an expression of their independence. Having an income provided freedom and the possibility to plan future goals based on meeting financial needs. Female identity was consistent with the need to be assertive and set boundaries in the workplace.

• Many of the women acknowledged and described how intuition could guide a career decision before making a final decision. Opinions of others were equally important to the decision making-process.

• Additional factors affected career decisions for the younger baby boom women but inconsistently. To a lesser extent, the possibility of chance could be imagined assisting career choice, but none of the women described how they could improve chance in favor of a career decision.

**Implications for Theory**

The findings of this study explored how human development theory and career decision-making theory applied to the experiences of younger baby boom women who were unemployed. Recent research has not explored this combination of factors even though the number of women who expect to be employed beyond age 65 has increased over the last decade (Toossi, 2013). Women in late middle age are discovering the extended work history provides time for career decisions (Bateson, 2010).

**Human Development**

Two main areas of human development theory are prominent in the study’s results. First, evidence was provided in support of previous human development theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Hoare, 2009). Adult development was influenced by a series of systems, the proximal processes that formed the primary forces for
development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). However, adult development was not experienced as merely a response to a number of systems. Human development occurred as a psychosocial stage as well (Hoare, 2009).

The women were consistent regarding psychosocial development. Their behavior was expected to be creative or caring toward others who were influential in their lives. If these forms of generativity were not present, the individual would be moving toward a stage of stagnation and decline (Erikson, E. H. & Erikson, 1997). The women in this study were changing and growing in self-awareness and level of caring for themselves and others.

Relational characteristics were also evident in the career choices and factors of influence on the career choice (Gilligan, 1982; Vandewater & Stewart, 2006). The women spoke of family and friends who were important to them (Valliant, 1977). In cases where an aging parent needed care, the woman was the caregiver (Stewart & Torges, 2006), even if it limited the career decision-making alternatives.

Second, contemporary human development theory that extends career development tasks into late middle age normalizes the experience of younger baby boom women and future generations (Anderson et al., 2012; Bateson, 2010). As medical advances increase the average human lifespan, human development research needs to continue to evolve. This study demonstrates the strong capacity for younger baby boom women to exhibit active growth and exploration. Instead of being hampered by negative thoughts, assumptions, and opinions, they were looking forward to growth and increased independence. Developing their careers was their key to improving their futures.
Career Development Theory

Career development theorists support increasing qualitative research in light of the need to understand traditional as well as contemporary career paths (Amundson et al., 2010). Labor market trends and changes in employment expectations deserve more attention of individual factors in career choice (Athanasou, 2003). Women have embraced the changing role of work in the 21st century (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2000). The predominant career theories that are supported by research on women and career choice are described next.

**Gottfredson’s theory.** Based on the themes presented by the women who defined work by gender, there was evidence to suggest that career stereotypes that were introduced during early adulthood were still guiding their career choice in late middle age. The occupational stereotypes were introduced by the father more frequently than the mother in this sample. The mother may not have been working or not considered as knowledgeable about work environments when these younger baby boom women were beginning their career in late 1970s to 1980s. The career identity formed in the orientation to the internal self (Gottfredson, 1981) appeared to remain into late middle age.

**Super’s life-span, life-space theory.** Super’s theory, which is both developmental and humanistic, described the life-span stages that continue through retirement. Conceptualized as stages that represent specific age ranges, the timing of the stages is no longer relevant to current career paths. Specifically related to this study, the women may have begun their career on a life stage trajectory but most instances were disrupted by the unemployment event. In other words, the ending of the employment might not have included stages of establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. However, in general, when the women described their career aspirations, the stages of growth and exploration applied to the career decision-making experience and beginning
a new career. Women’s roles change as they aged, which was evident in the interview themes. With a lengthy period of unemployment, the women typically also considered a change of career based on their skills and talents.

**Social cognitive career theory.** There was clear evidence in the transcripts that women who believed they were capable of returning to work would make a plan to implement a job search. SCCT can be applied more flexibly by a career counselor and the career counselor can encourage the women to consider the context of their career aspirations. The theory can be applied in a number of environments and contexts. The women may use this theory to challenge contextual factors in their life, including physical decline, ageism, and learning. The theory addresses barriers to career decision making that stem from the cognitive-person variables.

**Counselor Education and Career Theory**

Educators benefit from ongoing research that explicates the subjective experience of career decision making. The themes developed from the interviews of this study inform the counselor educator of current issues and challenges of unemployed younger baby boom women. The current growth of female participation in the labor market (Toossi, 2013) suggests the need for career counseling for this growing population. The duration of employment is also increasing, therefore, the need to provide career counseling to adults after age 51 is also increasingly probable. Instead of preparing for retirement, the need to work and the necessity to continue to work, increase the likelihood that more female clients will be seeking this service.

In addition, this study links applicable career counseling theories for women during late middle age. The counselor educator has sufficient evidence to include career development topics in additional classes beyond career development theories class (e.g., Human Development, Multicultural Counseling, and Family Counseling). As introduced by the themes in this study,
specific environmental and personal factors are concretely defined for potential case study problems. The student of counseling theory benefits from the broader exposure to themes based on the qualitative interviews.

**Implications for Practice**

As noted in the literature review, women have nonlinear career paths. Career decisions are complicated by psychosocial and bioecological system challenges (Bendien, 2013; Cohen et al., 2004; Ronzio, 2012). Ronzio (2012) deemed psychosocial development important for midlife women to explore issues of family relationships, physical and mental health, and contextual stressors. The contextual stressors included economic hardship, unemployment, minority status, gender inequities, and age discrimination. The majority of the women in the sample exemplify a nonlinear career path. Two distinct examples from the findings reflect the need for community and non-profit career counseling and employment services.

- The nonlinear career path has been considered “deviant” by human resources professionals (Shapiro et al., 2009). The women in this study were unemployed for an average of 10.8 months. Most were planning to extend their unemployment to retrain or to complete their decision-making process. Previous career interruptions occurred due to raising a family or assisting with extended family.

- The lethargic economic expansion has become the “new normal” (Woodward, 2013). In a slowed labor market, women have additional concerns about negative stereotypes. One of the informants compared her job search at a younger age to her current job search. She sent resumes to prospective employers and expected to have interview offers, but had none. She attributed the lack of response to her age, but the slowed economic expansion can also contribute to decreased job interviews.
In order to reduce the effect of negative perceptions, career counselors and career services suggest resume writing and interviewing strategies that overcome the effects of ageism (Bendick, Jackson, & Romero, 1996; Woog, 2016). Several women in the study explained the benefits of using non-profit career services providers. One informant confirmed that the career services practitioner coached her on ways to navigate a difficult labor market with less than ideal career history. This example applied career counseling to practice.

**Career Counseling Applications**

Among the numerous career development theories that might be brought to bear on the findings, SCCT (Lent et al., 2000) appears to best address the concerns explored by the women in this study. The theory considers “cognitive-person variables” and the effect those variables have on the complete person and their environment during the course of career decision making (Lent et al., 2000). Using SCCT, a counselor integrates the thoughts, assumptions, and opinions of the woman within a particular environment in order to develop her career decision clarity.

**Applying the SCCT model.** Most of the women in the present study were unemployed for less than a year; their experiences might inform the following scenario showing how the SCCT model might be applied.

During the first months of unemployment, a woman begins to question whether she has the proper computer skills to enter the labor market. She compares herself to younger members of her family who appear comfortable with computer applications technology. The woman decides she is not ready to enter a particular job. The career counselor explores the thought process and determines whether the beliefs are refutable. Pointing out the threatening beliefs, the counselor directs the woman to attend a computer skills workshop in her community.
During interaction with the instructor and the mixed age class, the woman learns that computer literacy varies by individual and computer literacy can be learned. There are younger and older computer users in the class. At the same time, the woman practices the new skill and changes her thoughts about her own computer literacy. The additional support of the classroom environment facilitates self-efficacy. The job search process improves due to her personal agency.

**Personal agency and younger baby boom women.** Job seekers in the 21st century are expected to be resilient, curious, creative, persistent, and possess a strong work ethic (Pelsma & Arnett, 2012). Recalling the themes of the women interviewed in the study, many of those characteristics were identified by the sample. The slowed labor market growth requires job seekers to be open-minded and dismiss out of date work attitudes (Zunker, 1998). A person with personal agency values change and the benefits of innovation.

**Career services and younger baby boom women.** The women in this study were unemployed due to loss of a job or terminating a job due to personal reasons. Five women were participating in non-profit career services provided by the state or local agencies. Their interview themes emphasized some characteristics of personal agency. They had initiative to seek the services. Once they were participants in the workshops and classes, they learned about entrepreneurship, updating technology skills, and the reality of the local labor market. The women demonstrated their commitment to re-enter the workforce. Career services normalized their career path (Shapiro et al., 2008).

**Younger baby boom women and the future.** One of the implications of the lived time existential was the consideration of time and the application of the research to subsequent generations. The themes of the interviews introduce an understanding of career decision-making
for a specific generation. Those thoughts, assumptions, and opinions that stem from the generation (e.g., work ethic, beliefs about technology) may not be entirely transferable to later generations, as the experience that is linked to the generation will not apply to a later generation in the same manner. Thoughts, assumptions, and opinions, such as the changing view of who is best suited to provide childcare and how the family will continue to maintain a standard of living, may change over time and not apply to generations equally. However, there are themes that will likely transcend time—meaning of unemployment, influential persons in the career decision-making process, and career identity are examples. The juxtaposition of the changing social policy, economics, and longevity contributed to the particular research question of this study.

**Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative social research has limitations that must be acknowledged in order to communicate the context of the study (Glesne, 2011). This section details the conditions of the study. Recognizing the limitations of the study also contributes to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 2011). Limitations of the research design were discussed in Chapter 3.

The present inquiry recruited nine participants using purposive sampling. Since all of the participants were younger baby boom women who were unemployed and also making career decisions, the sample is considered a criterion-based sample. The entire sample has experienced the same phenomenon. The sample was recruited from one geographical location due to the large number of women who were in the appropriate age bracket. The researcher was able to use county demographic statistics to evaluate the potential number of women who were in the younger baby boom generation. In that same data table, there was also evidence that the population had a high rate of high school graduates. The high school graduation rate was
consistent with the published literature (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006). The researcher narrowed recruitment to a small rural county in western Pennsylvania.

Originally, the research design intended to recruit women who recently utilized the free services of the state employment agency. Since this population was unavailable through the gatekeeper of the agency, a secondary recruitment process was formulated. The population was broadened by recruiting at community centers, libraries, churches, and other free non-profit employment services. This recruitment strategy was broad enough to generate sufficient inquiries but in fact, five of the nine initial participants were previous clients of two non-profit employment services. Four of the women responded to the flyer posted in libraries and churches community centers. One was later removed as a non-example of unemployment and making career decisions. Given this sampling limitation, the findings may be most relevant to women who go through career development services.

The majority of the women were financially stable. They were not the head of household or if they were head of household, they had financial resources to continue as an unemployed person. Three of the original nine participants were African American, however the excluded interview reduced the participation to two of the eight participants. Both women had long tenures of employment prior to unemployment; only one of the two reflected on what her experience was like as an unemployed, educated, African American woman.

The researcher’s participation in the analysis and interpretations is also a limitation of the study (Glesne, 2011; van Manen, 1990). Although the researcher has a number of years working in the career counseling field, all of the participants were not clients at the time of the study. The recruitment procedure intentionally gathered women who utilized services not offered by the researcher’s organization. The researcher was able to interview the women and understand each
person’s novel experience. The reflective journal assisted with bracketing the researcher’s bias and expectations from the interpretation and analysis of the findings.

All of the participants received a copy of the interview transcript to review for inaccuracies or for additional comments. Two of the transcripts were revised and returned. One of those transcripts was from the recording that malfunctioned. The participant did not provide the data for subsidiary question four during the last portion of the interview. This omission was noted in the frequency table and report of the findings.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The study presented an extensive source of data for analysis and interpretation. The qualitative design answered the primary and subsidiary research questions within the social setting for a particular generational cohort. The findings provided a detailed understanding of the career decision-making experience of a specific group of unemployed younger baby boom women. The study could be extended and related studies are suggested by this present inquiry. Future research may address the following:

- Follow the participants through the career decision-making process and job search as a longitudinal investigation. Conduct interviews at six month and one year intervals following the original interview to extend the understanding of the career decision-making experience and implementation of the job search.

- Investigate the experiences of a more diverse group of women. Approach specific populations to include minority women, women with disabilities, women who are head of household, and other attributes not represented in this study or minimally represented in the present inquiry. Broaden the grouping to include certain fields such as women who choose STEM careers, or women who choose religious life and service.
• Investigate the career decision making-process for men of the younger baby boom generation as well as subsequent generations. The same could be suggested for investigating women of various generations.

• Explore the career decision-making process of unemployed populations of culturally diverse groups to include sexual minorities, refugees, and immigrants.

• Conduct narrative research on a particularly unique group’s experience or documenting an oral history as shifts in cultural norms are evident. This is the case of the shift toward longer work histories and longer lifespan.

• Utilize quantitative methods to research non-profit and for-profit career decision-making services.

• Design quantitative research to investigate the themes in the present study. Use validated measures of career decision making, such as the Career Decision Making Self Efficacy scale (Taylor & Betz, 1983) and/or the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (Gati & Saka, 2001). Recruit larger samples in order to generalize results.

• Investigate the role of career calling in populations underrepresented in career development literature. Career calling involves purpose or meaning through discerning work for the greater good or a Higher Power (Dik & Duffy, 2009).

• Interview service providers to identify how they provide services that support career development for subgroups in the population. Identify model programs to replicate services for specialized populations.

• Interview mothers and daughters to explore how the modeling of a particular career trajectory affects the younger generation.
Final Thoughts

When I began to consider what was known about younger baby boom women and their career path, I often heard people dismiss the research question as a study of the “empty nest syndrome.” The aging of America was a popular topic and most people in the United States knew that the aging population was due to a large number of people born between 1946 and 1964 and longevity. The baby boom generation influence has been researched broadly, from political policy to marketing. However, when I searched for research on younger baby boom women and careers, I was unsuccessful. Babbie (2010) described this as “agreement reality;” certain knowledge is created by the culture rather than through research.

Career development literature provided a corpus of literature on women and careers. For example, Sampson et al. (2014), found gender frequently as a topic in the Career Development Quarterly annual reviews between 1988 and 2012. Less frequently, the literature focused on theory-research-practice articles. At the same time, career development literature has accepted the need for more qualitative research methods (Stead et al., 2012). The qualitative, social constructivist framework serves to provide an understanding of the individual’s world (Creswell, 2013). IPA analysis included levels of analysis to interpret data, explore theoretical interpretations of the data, and apply the interpretations to practice (Smith et al., 2012). In my own professional experience, I have met more women than men who were unemployed and seeking post-secondary education. I believed it was time to remove agreement reality from my day-to-day practice. This was the impetus for the present study.

While interviewing the unemployed younger baby boom women in this study, I learned that they were industrious and energetic during their period of unemployment. They treated their lack of employment as a new job—a chance to work on themselves. Prior to arriving on the
scene of post-secondary education, they had to balance the various levels of systems fighting for attention in the career decision-making process. Technology and discrimination posed potential setbacks for their future career. They weighed the need for caring for themselves, their extended families, and the search for making their life meaningful. Not all go on to attend post-secondary education. My understanding of unemployed younger baby boom women improved by interviewing those women I would never have met otherwise.

Generations that follow the younger baby boomers have learned from these “pioneers.” Baby boom women changed work trajectories and opened possibilities for future women and men who seek non-traditional career paths. Checking the agreement reality on the expectations about career tenure, life insurance marketers and investment firms remind the newly employed to begin saving early. Certainly, the findings of this study support the contention that career paths will extend beyond age 67 and those who save early will have more choice to deliberate about how that path develops.
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Appendix A

Individual Interview Protocol
Appendix D: Individual Interview Protocol

Understanding unemployed young baby boom women’s experience of career decision making

Date: ____________________________  Study Code: ____________  Researcher: ____________________________  Place: ____________________________
Start and ending time of interview: ____________________________

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study is to explore, describe, and understand the career decision-making experience of unemployed women born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964. The career decision-making experience is generally defined as identifying career alternatives that will satisfy an individual’s characteristics and circumstances.

Individual Interview Semi-Structured Questions:
After collecting the demographic survey, use the information to get acquainted with the participant.

Let's begin with your career timeline. Please answer the following questions based on what you wrote on the timeline.

a. How have the events, thoughts, opinions, and assumptions affected your career decisions?
b. What seems to be the most significant? Which points are high and which are low?
c. What things have you learned that you could use to make decisions about your future career?

How do your thoughts, assumptions, and opinions affect your career decision-making experience?
There are three descriptive parts that are explored in this research:
1. Birth year between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964
2. Female
3. Unemployed

As I ask you the questions you may answer based on one of the descriptions or a combination of the descriptions. Please feel free to tell me anything that might be part of your career decision currently. This conversation is confidential so you can tell me any details that are making an impact on your decision. If you are hesitant that something might be important, but you are thinking about how the report will be written, we can discuss a way to maintain your confidentiality but still reflect the thought, assumption, belief, or life event in a general way to not reveal your identity. The things that you tell me could be “big” or something you consider to be very minimal, have no expectations for certain answers.

Questions to be explored:
I’m going to start by asking general questions, and get more specific as we go.

a. First, what is it like to be making career decisions while you are unemployed?
   b. Specifically, how does being female affect your career decision-making experience?
      • What thoughts do you have that you would attribute to being female?
      • What assumptions do you have that you think reflect being female?
      • What opinions do you have that you think reflect being female?
      • Does it matter that you are in the younger baby boom generation making a career decision?
      • If yes, (it does matter), how does being in the younger baby boom generation affect your thinking (assumptions, and opinions)?
c. Let’s shift the focus a little from the role of being a female to what role being an unemployed younger baby boomer plays in how you think about yourself and the career decision making process.
   • What does it mean to you to be an unemployed at this particular point in your life?
   • Can you recall the thoughts you have had about the economic conditions and the way those thoughts affect your career decision?
   • One of the changes to social policy that might affect how you think about your careers is the upcoming changes to the Social Security retirement laws. Are you aware of the changes to the law? What does the change mean to you as someone who is around 50 years old?
   • What are the most vital thoughts, assumptions, and opinions related to late midlife and making a career decision?
   • What cultural values affect the career decision making experience?

   d. I’m also interested in learning more about the role career plays in how you think about yourself/your identity as a person.
   • Would you say that you have ever thought about who you are based on your career?
   • Does your career create any thoughts about who you are within the community? Your family?
   • If your career is a way to describe who you are, what would your career tell you about yourself?
   • How important is this version of you to deciding on a career?

   e. Are there any other thoughts, assumptions, and opinions that we haven’t yet talked about that are also important to understand your experience of career decision making?

   f. Do you have any thoughts, assumptions, or opinions about career decision-making that you keep to yourself?
   • What is the effect of keeping your thoughts, assumptions, and opinions about career decision-making to yourself?

   g. There are sometimes factors outside somebody’s own thinking that factor into their career decision making. I’m interested in learning more about what you think about some of these factors too.
   • Do you think intuition plays a role in your career decision?
   • How?
   • What about chance?
   • How?
   • What about other people’s opinion?
   • If so, whose?
   • Why?
   • Has anyone ever asked you about your career decision making?
   • Are you working with someone to help you gain employment?
   • What types of things do you talk about related to career decisions?

   h. What question should I have asked that I did not?
   • Okay… how would you answer that question?

As a way to wrap up, it might be helpful just to check in how you’re feeling after talking about your career decision-making experience.
   a. Picture yourself getting a new job, and you find out it’s even better than you expected.
   b. I have a list of inspiration, advice, & affirmations. Which will you think of in the future?
   c. To conclude, would you say your overall mood is happy, sad, or somewhere in between?
Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
600 FORBES AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

Be part of an important research study:
Understanding career decision making and
unemployment during late middle age

Are you female? Born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964?

Are you unemployed and currently making career decisions?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in
a research study titled: Understanding unemployed younger baby
boom women’s experience of career decision making.
I am seeking interviewees to participate in one interview on how your
thoughts, assumptions and opinions affect your career decision-making
experience. To gather this information you will:
- Fill out a brief demographic survey (about 5 minutes)
- Roughly map out your career timeline (about 15 minutes)
- Answer interview questions focusing on your thoughts, assumptions, and opinions
  related to your career decision-making experience (about 45 minutes)

Interviews will occur in private at either the Learning Resource Center at
Community College of Beaver County or at Job Training for Beaver County,
Inc. Your participation in this study is confidential. I will explain the steps
taken to protect your privacy and anonymity prior to beginning the study.

If you agree to participate:
- you will receive a $10 Giant Eagle gift card as a small token of appreciation.
- researchers will gain a better understanding of the career decision-making
  experience of unemployed younger baby boom women.

For more information about this study or to volunteer to participate please contact
me at:
Karen Ganska, M.S. (PhD Candidate, Counselor Education and Supervision)
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
Duquesne University
ganskak@duq.edu OR 724-480-5912 (private email or personal cell phone)

I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Matthew Bundick, Ph. D. in the department of
Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education at Duquesne University. If you have any
questions concerning this research study or your participation in the study, please contact me,
Karen Ganska, M. S. at 724-480-5912 or ganskak@duq.edu, or Dr. Matthew Bundick at 412-
396-6110 or bundickm@duq.edu.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Duquesne
University. Participation will be kept confidential.
Appendix C

Consent form
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Understanding Unemployed Younger Baby Boom Women’s Experience of Career Decision Making

INVESTIGATOR: Karen T. Ganska, M. S., doctoral candidate, 724.480.5912

ADVISOR: Matthew J. Bundick, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
412.396.6110

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the career decision making experience of younger baby boom women who are unemployed. You will be asked to complete a brief demographic survey (5 minutes) and then roughly outline your prior career decisions and related thoughts, assumptions, and opinions (15 minutes). In addition, you will be asked to allow a trained researcher to interview you (45 minutes). The interviews will be taped and transcribed. After the interview, the transcript will be provided to you to check for omissions or errors.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The researcher is aware that the discussion of unemployment may bring up some uncomfortable thoughts or feelings; however such discomfort would be expected to be no greater than would occur in the course of normal conversation. To reduce possible negative feelings, the interview ends with positive guided imagery and affirmations related to career. You may benefit from understanding how certain thoughts, assumptions, and opinions affect your personal career decision-making experience.

COMPENSATION: At the conclusion of the interview, you will receive a $10 Giant Eagle gift card.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. Prior to collecting data, each participant will be assigned a study code to mask participant names on the demographic survey.
Recordings will use the study code for transcription but your name will not appear on any transcript. Quotes may be used but no identity will be revealed in the data analysis or results. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate during data collection and there will be no negative consequences if you choose to withdraw.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Karen T. Ganska, 724-480-5912 or ganskak@duq.edu, Dr. Matthew Bundick, Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education 412-396-6110 and Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board 412-396-6326.

Participant's Signature ___________________________ Date ____________

Researcher's Signature ___________________________ Date ____________
Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

The research project is seeking to understand unemployed younger baby boom women’s experience of career decision making.

Your answers on the demographic questionnaire will be reported in a general format that will not reveal your individual identity. Completing this demographic questionnaire does not obligate you to participate in the research project.

Thank You!

Questions 1-3 confirm you are eligible for the study
1. Are you female? Yes No
2. Were you born between January 1, 1955 and December 31, 1964? Yes No
3. Are you currently unemployed? Yes No

If your answer is YES to each of questions 1 – 3, you are eligible to participate in this research study.

If you decide to participate, please answer questions 4-12. The purpose is to provide background information for the interviewer.

4. How long have you been unemployed during this period of unemployment?

5. High School Education: Select one that describes your high school education
   ○ Earned a High School Diploma
   ○ Earned a GED
   ○ Did not Graduate High School

6. Are you currently enrolled in a 2-year Community College, a 4-year College or University, or a Technical School? Yes No

7. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, in what type of school are you currently enrolled? (choose one)
   ○ 2-year Community College
   ○ 4-year College or University
   ○ Technical School

8. Have you graduated from a 2-year Community College, 4-year College or University or Technical School? (please circle the correct response)
   Yes No

9. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, which of the following best describes any graduate-level education you may have?
   ○ Currently enrolled in a graduate-level program
   ○ Graduated from a graduate-level program
   ○ Never enrolled in graduate-level education

10. Number of people in your household (including you): __________
11. Are you the head of your household?  Yes  No

12. How do you identify your race?  

13. Study Code identification:  

This portion of the document will be removed by the researcher after the transcript verification is complete. The contact information will be destroyed to maintain anonymity.

Contact Information
Please provide your contact information. This information will only be used to contact you after the interview to confirm the transcript has no errors. Karen Ginska will contact you to review the transcript using the information listed below. Your answers from this demographic questionnaire will not be shared with a third-party.

First Name  Last Name

Phone Number  Email Address
Appendix E

Career Lifeline
Appendix B Career Lifeline

Understanding unemployed younger baby boom women's experience of career decision making

Purpose: this exercise will help you to remember important life events and your career. This step will help you prepare for the individual interview. It will take approximately 15 minutes.

Directions: Using a page of paper horizontally, draw a timeline for your career history. This timeline is a visual picture of your career life, including the beginning and ending. Begin your career at the point you recognize the work or activity as career. Use an "X" to mark important change points in your life, and label the peaks and valleys with a few words to describe the thoughts, assumptions, opinions, and events (e.g., finished high school, looked for part time work to be home more, promotion at work). Events that were positive and had a positive effect would be a peak, rising above the timeline and events that were negative and had a negative impact would fall below the timeline. From this timeline you will see how events, thoughts, opinions, and assumptions are connected and show the flow of your life from one event to the next.

During the interview, we will begin by talking about your timeline including:

How have the events, thoughts, opinions, and assumptions affected your career decisions?

What seems to be the most significant?

What things have you learned from these events that you could use to plan your future career?

You may use the back of this page to draw your career timeline.