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Midlife women's lived experience : their patterns of health, leisure and enjoyment

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**MIDLIFE WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCE:
THEIR PATTERNS OF HEALTH,
LEISURE AND ENJOYMENT**

MYRA JOSEPHINE BETSCHILD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University
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ABSTRACT

This study was prompted by the negative images of midlife women portrayed in the literature and popular culture. Apart from a few accounts of extraordinary feats, which counter the generalisations about midlife women, for example, a 76 year old grandmother going sky-diving, there is very little written about midlife women living enjoyable, independent lives. This work presents a detailed analyses of the way in which thirty women have been able to, or are in the process of, actively structuring an enjoyable midlife.

Previous research has tended to view aspects of women's lives in isolation, such as leisure, body, health, or work. The artificial boundaries that have arisen because of this separation reinforce societal notions of fragmentation within social life. This research was designed to challenge these divisions and, by investigating women's enjoyable experiences, to develop concepts that are common across the composition of these women's lives.

A feminist phenomenological methodology was used and semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken to access women's lived experience of enjoyment, their lifeworld, and also to determine participants understanding of the concept of leisure and their experience of menopause. All interviews were transcribed and subjected to a systematic content analysis, as advocated by phenomenological research practitioners.

The findings contradict the predominantly negative popular images of midlife women and show that most of the women in the study are in the act of resisting the earlier views of women and ageing. Their responses also indicate they tend not to recognise the fragmentation of their lives into work, leisure and health issues, but rather regard their lives as 'all together and not separated out'. An enjoyable lifeworld means being regarded as an individual and independent person and having 'a sense of being in charge', over their own time and space, making opportunities for physical, social, creative and intellectual activity, as well as preparing for the future.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of how midlife women are creating enjoyable lifestyles. The concept of enjoyment and enjoyable experiences appear to defy segmentation, and the women are in the act of composing their own lives.

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Special thanks need to be extended to the thirty women who were interviewed. Their willingness to spend time talking about their lives and sharing their stories has made the research possible. The rich information they provided has contributed towards a better understanding of midlife women's lives and dreams.

My thanks are also due to colleagues in women's studies at the University of Adelaide as well as colleagues in other institutions, in particular Margie Ripper, Jackie Cook, Bev Simmons for being there when I needed someone to talk to, discuss problems and or comment on a particular section of the thesis. Also Pam Maitland who has read and edited several chapters and entered into the spirit of the research, as well as Shirley Brown who has done the final 'polishing'/formatting of the script. Thanks also to the various members of my family, Brian and my two sons Glenn and Brent as well as my sister Julia and brothers John and Robert who have all taken a keen interest in the progress of the work over the years, despite them all being either interstate or overseas.

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PREFACE: MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

My lifetime interest and passion has been to enable women to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Academic qualifications in physical education, recreation and counselling, as well as personal life experiences, have provided the frameworks I have used while teaching at the three levels of education: primary, secondary and tertiary. During the last twenty years I have been engaged in teaching at the tertiary level in the area of recreation, health and leisure, teaching mainly women students and more recently in women's studies where almost 100% of enrolled students are women.

An undergraduate degree in Physical Education, completed in 1957 at Otago University in New Zealand, was my first step towards embracing an holistic approach to wellbeing. The three-year course encompassed a very wide-ranging curriculum and provided graduates with the knowledge and opportunity to 'physically educate' pupils in secondary schools. Because there was a director who embraced a very liberal philosophy of physical education and also because there were more women than men students and staff I was regarded along with my fellow students on an equal footing. This was contrary to the attitude towards sport and physical activity that was dominant in the general community. Physical education focused on the physical body, and health and wellbeing were concerned with disciplining the body to perform both the necessary skills for sports and to remain physically fit.

Marriage and motherhood occupied my time through the early 1960s but I also maintained my own physical fitness by playing basketball as well as taking evening 'get fit' classes for women. It was here that I began to realise the importance of women taking time for themselves and the difficulties they faced when trying to attend a class at night for their own health and wellbeing, as well as for enjoyment. The classes were based on physical exercise to music, and the social aspect of talking with other women as well as the sheer enjoyment of moving their bodies, was part of the whole experience and ensured their attendance most nights. These women were finding the time and space in their busy lives, for their own enjoyment.

Many New Zealanders travel overseas. Whether it is because of the adventuring nature of our pioneering great-grandparents, or whether it is

because we live a long way away from the rest of the world, nevertheless we have the travel 'bug'. I was no exception and with my husband and two sons, under five, we set off, in the mid 1960s, to Canada to teach initially in southern Canada and then inside the Arctic Circle in the North West Territories. Arriving in Canada was not a big cultural shock but arriving in the Arctic definitely provided the challenge and excitement that we had been looking for. Teaching Inuit, Canadian Indians, Metis and whites in the same physical education class ensured a complete reassessment of previously learned methodology and assumptions. For example, six year old Inuit children, when asked to go and stand in a circle start looking around to find 'the circle' to stand in. Despite having very different perceptions and experiences of the world, the enjoyment of playing games and moving their bodies appeared to be universal. The experience of living and working in a completely different culture was profound and became a motivation for further travel experiences.

We returned to New Zealand and lived in the central North Island thermal region town of Rotorua. Here we taught in schools where Maoris made up more than 50% of the school population - a new cultural experience. In 1972, as a 37 year old second wave feminist, I went to study in the United States. Accompanied by my husband (who was also studying for his masters) and two sons, I registered in a Masters degree in recreation and counselling at the University of New Mexico. This was an exciting and challenging experience for me, being a mature-age graduate student and teaching assistant in a large university in the south-west where there was again a different cultural mix of students included afro-American, chicano, Navajo and white. Academically, this was the time when the early theories of leisure and recreation were being developed and the Third Wave humanistic psychologists were expounding their theories on inter-personal communication and relationships. I also enrolled in a women's studies course where I was introduced to theories of feminism and the new consciousness-raising groups that became an important part of the political feminist movement. Studying recreation for the first time provided me with further insight into the importance of taking into consideration other aspects of people's lives and the development of an integrated approach to education for life. The title of a paper I wrote at this time 'Leisure - a goal of life', captures the holism of the theories and techniques I was seeking.

In 1975, International Women's Year (IWY), back in New Zealand, teaching in yet another school with a multi-cultural mix of students, I became an active member of various political and educational groups. I was a delegate at the National IWY Women's Conference in Wellington attended by over 2,200 women, where I presented a workshop on Women and Age. As part of this workshop a questionnaire on women's experience of the menopause was distributed and women shared their stories of getting older and their enjoyable experiences. The discussions in the groups raised my consciousness regarding older women's issues and listening to Margaret Mead, the keynote speaker then in her seventies, was an inspiration for everyone at the conference. Women, while being confined in their given roles, were finding ways to live their lives in ways that contradicted and challenged the traditional stereotypes of wife and mother. This year focusing on women provided me with the framework and motivation to consolidate my thoughts and ideas on feminism and develop my own theories on women's place and women's lives in society.

Feminism raised many issues regarding women's lives, their 'being in the world' in particular. My main interest at this time was the difficulty of combining as well as the lack of 'fit' between the three roles: being a mother, a wife and having time for self. Thoughts and ideas are one thing, but putting them into practice are another and it was not until the next change in my life that I was able to accomplish this.

The following year the opportunity arose to move to South Australia and, subsequently undertake a part-time lecturing position in a College of Advanced Education. It was here that I developed a course on Women and Health which was a first in the Australian tertiary sector. My aim in the course was to provide students, both male and female, with the opportunity to learn and discuss all aspects of women's health including the physical, physiological, emotional and social dimensions. It was based on my own philosophy that women needed to learn about their bodies and selves and actively take control of their own health and wellbeing.

As the political activity of the feminist movement gained momentum in the community the women involved began to demand a more intellectual approach to feminism and feminist theory. Feminist academics proposed units in women's studies and highlighted the need for women's studies awards to be developed within the tertiary sector. The women and health

unit I taught was adapted and became one of the subjects to be included in the first Graduate Diploma in Women's Studies accredited in 1978.

I had been active in the women's movement during this time, both as a volunteer counsellor at the Rape Crisis Centre and taking Get Fit classes at a local Women's Community Centre. I extended my commitment and was elected president in the state Women's Sport and Recreation Association and also became a founding committee member in the national sport and recreation body. I also re-activated my earlier interest, from New Zealand, in tramping/bushwalking and established a Women Walking group which attracted many women of all ages interested in back-packing the various trails around the state. This has continued to be my passion - introducing women to this activity and providing opportunities for them to continue to enjoy the physical, emotional and spiritual pleasures of walking in the bush.

During the last twenty years my theoretical perspective in teaching has changed from a liberal/radical feminist with energy invested in the promotion of social change to more recently regarding myself as an unaligned feminist with changing paradigms. With the assimilation of poststructuralism into feminism, postmodern theories have increasingly attracted me. They enable aspects of peoples lives to 'flatten out' or equalise so that my work with women's leisure pursuits has begun to reveal 'reconstructed' women of all ages. For example women are no longer constrained by feeling guilty if they choose to spend time with friends, travelling overseas or day-dreaming rather than doing the housework or doing obligatory charity work. There is no hierarchy of 'good'. My own main emphasis has been on what women themselves can do to take control of their lives by understanding the relationships between health and wellbeing and a satisfying lifestyle which includes enjoyment. Increasingly, I observe more women taking an "individual practice" approach, taking on personal challenges rather than group identification as in the older universalising feminisms.

By the early 1980s I was finding that it was no longer possible to reconcile my feminist goals with the traditional 'male' leisure theories because of their gender blindness, androcentric viewpoint and lack of understanding regarding women's lives. Emerging feminist theories on leisure, developed in the United States (Henderson *et al* 1989 1996) and the United Kingdom (Green *et al* 1987 1990; Wimbush & Talbot 1988) in particular, provided

support for my own theories of women's leisure which took into account the reality of women's lives and their roles. Yet although these theories challenged the work/leisure dichotomy, the traditional approach to understanding leisure, they still appeared to be confined to a narrow interpretation of leisure.

Because I was not satisfied with the way leisure was being theorised, and, at the same time, was also challenging the concept of leisure itself I began to develop a model that took into account both leisure and health. The connections appeared obvious to me: leisure is about taking time for pleasurable activities and enjoying oneself; health and wellbeing require specific components, for example basic physical fitness, low stress levels, good nutrition; and pleasurable experiences invariably depend on health and wellbeing components in order to give one the capacity to enjoy fully these experiences. How could these aspects of people's lives be regarded separately?

My graduate university classes on 'Women's Health and Leisure', with all mature-aged women students, provided me with ample evidence of the importance of taking into account the whole of women's lives when discussing health and leisure. A compulsory part of these courses was a weekend camp which was designed to provide a healthy, recreational experience and enable the women to experience two days of 'healthy living'. These camps were invariably based at a fixed camp/youth hostel/community camp within 30kms of Adelaide. Despite many anxieties about being in the bush for two days, away from their families and without shower facilities, the women soon became immersed in the all-women culture, survived the 12–15km bush walk, ate fantastic food brought by them, forgot about their 'other' lives and found that they thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Other personal experiences with women friends, such as bush-walking, cycling trips, regular daily walking with colleagues, have confirmed my belief in the links between health and enjoyable experiences and the necessity to take into account all aspects of women's lives when developing new theories of leisure and enjoyment.

I am a healthy, physically active sixty-two year old midlife woman. My two sons are in their mid thirties and I have two grand-daughters aged five and two years old. I live as an independent woman and share my house with a friend, a seventy year old poet who also maintains her fitness by walking

and doing yoga. During the last few years I have continued to lead bushwalks for women, including long walks of five to ten days. I maintain my own level of physical health and wellbeing by walking every day for forty minutes, riding my bike and doing a weekly yoga class.

This research could be regarded as a culmination of my life's achievements, to date, of working and being involved with women of all ages to enable them to experience enjoyable physically active lives. As a woman in midlife I do not identify with the traditional stereotypes of being at the mercy of my hormones and 'over the hill' as portrayed in our society. Because of this I was motivated to question and challenge these negative images of women and find out how other midlife women were living their lives. Although several of the women spoke about having periods of difficult times during midlife I was impressed and humbled by their resilience and determination to overcome adversity. The majority of the women I interviewed provided ample evidence to support another view of midlife which is inspiring, exciting and demonstrates they are resisting these stereotypes and having 'the time of their lives'.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

I knew immediately that this complicated adult concept of leisure is that thing which as a child I would have called fun. As a child I never stopped to say to myself, "is it OK. to enjoy this?" or "am I supposed to enjoy that?"; either I was having fun or I was not, they were heart not head responses. But somewhere along the way, my head took over and I started asking those questions ... [However] the child in me lives on, she is exactly as she was, strong-willed, and always full of good advice. It is she that has fun, I depend upon her for my recreation and leisure. This is a concept which I own, it usurps any socially constructed forces which would seek to dominate me. It is at once both exhilarating and liberating (Dawn 1991).

There appears to be much confusion and puzzlement about this word, 'leisure'. With the recognition that leisure is a more complex, personal and social construction it is necessary to get away from the essentially class/gender/ culturally bound concept, and become more aware of the multifaceted/layered nature of leisure (Green *et al.* 1990). For women, the relationship between leisure and the rest of their lives is complex and, as one of the participants in this study, stated:

If this [topic] was about how do you feel about your life then I would be able to say that leisure is part of my life, it comes into it, but not in big slabs of time or space, but the concept would be there.

In this statement, Gloria echoes the findings of Wearing's (1990) research on young mothers, which demonstrated that leisure was not singled out, fragmented or treated as an entity that is separate from other aspects of their lives. A new terminology, as well as different analytic frameworks, need to be developed to properly reflect and incorporate the intricacies of women's daily lives, including their health and wellbeing as well as leisure. These issues will be expanded upon and discussed in chapters two and three of the thesis.

Despite the evidence that for many centuries women have been involved in various leisure pursuits – including mountain climbing and exploring (Moorehead 1974; McCrone 1988) as well as other physical activities, for example the bicycling that boomed in the 1890s (Hargreaves 1994; Simpson 1995) – it is only recently that leisure, in the context of women's roles and their lives, has been examined, researched and discussed by feminists in a more inclusive way, by Green *et al.* (1987, 1990), Wimbush & Talbot (1988), Henderson *et al.* (1989, 1996) and Wearing (1992b, 1994), amongst others. The

work of these feminist social scientists drew attention to the traditionally androcentric focus of leisure research in which males' experiences are made central and women's experiences are evaluated against this norm (Bella 1989). These feminists have examined the meanings of women's leisure and maintain that the study of leisure should be viewed within the framework of our understanding of women's oppression and gender relations. The research by Henderson (1991b) and Henderson & Bialeschki (1991) examined constraints to women's leisure and Green *et al.* (1990) and Scraton (1994) stressed the need to examine women's leisure holistically, rather than as a separate segment of their lives. This involves recognising not only the constraints to opportunities for enjoyable activities but also issues relating to differences between women, in terms of age, health and employment status, ethnicity, sexuality and family situation.

Although there has been an increasing amount of feminist leisure research, as mentioned previously there has been little research on women in midlife. The dearth of research on older women parallels the impact of the destructive forces of ageism and sexism on how women are viewed once they reach menopause. The work that has been done rarely looks at the complexities of older women's lifeworlds, leisure involvement and what they enjoy. However, there is now a body of knowledge developing, particularly from anecdotal accounts (Gray 1991; Vickers & Thomas 1993), that indicates women in this age group are finding a 'new beginning' to their lives. They realise they now have more freedom to pursue their own interests without the restrictions that have been previously placed on them by the society in which they live (Coney 1991). They do this in defiance of the negative stereotypes of ageing. As Winnie, in this study, said:

Freedom, freedom at last – I've served my apprenticeship with my family – I earned the right to do my own thing – and now I can enjoy myself and do anything I like to promote my own feeling of wellbeing.

This chapter begins with a section on 'Choosing the research topic'. The purpose of the study follows, and includes a short discussion as to why the topic is problematic. Finally there is an overview of the thesis.

CHOOSING THE RESEARCH TOPIC

When I began to think about a research focus for this thesis it was not difficult to make the choice of women's experience of enjoyment. My own journey (see the Preface) provides the background for this choice. As my understanding of feminist theories developed the contradictions between the reality of women's lives and the malestream theories of leisure became

more apparent. The various theoretical frameworks in which I have worked, such as physical education and health as well as leisure, enabled me to link the reciprocal components of experience and theory and develop new understandings of women's lives.

Physical education and sport, with their focus on the disciplined physical body, provided the first setting for my work and, although this has continued to be important throughout my personal and professional life, I have always questioned and challenged the androcentric research that positioned men's experience and physical ability as the norm and women's as the 'other' or inferior. The importance of women's participation in sport and physical education as well as the difficulties arising from being involved in this male dominated activity have also been acknowledged by other feminists including Talbot (1979) and Hargreaves (1985) in Britain and Darlison (1981) and Bryson (1987) in Australia. Scraton (1992) in her work on girls' physical education, identified the structures of: "'patriarchal power', 'sexuality' and the 'division of labour' as central to an understanding of gender – girls' physical education being an institutional form which maintains and reinforces these structures" (p. 124).

My early studies in recreation and leisure at the University of New Mexico (1972–3) did not take gender into account. Research and theories were developed using men's lives as the norm, and women were usually only referred to in relation to the leisure of families rather than in terms of their own leisure. While apparently relying on research about the lived experience of people's lives, for example see Dumazedier (1967) and Kaplan (1975), this multi-disciplinary area of recreation and leisure was, to me, ignoring the complex pattern of women's lives and their position in the world. As Green *et al.* (1990) comment "it is only within the last decade that researchers and theorists have begun to recognise the significance of gender" (p. 30). The subsequent feminist research has challenged and redressed much of the androcentrism of this earlier work.

My experience with different cultures also enabled me to widen my perspective on various aspects of people's lives. I became very aware of racial and ethnic differences, particularly those of indigenous people, and the importance of considering differences between individuals. For example, the conflict between the Inuit's traditional upbringing, where everyone in the community had an equally important place, and the competitive ethos of the colonising white culture was highlighted in schools where the

education of these pupils was based on a white anglo curriculum with assessment based on tests and exams. I found it was important not to make assumptions about these children and, as a classroom teacher, I tried to relate the curriculum to their own lives in the small Arctic communities and villages. It was a two-way learning experience. The significance of this example highlights the inappropriateness of researching people's lived experience without some understanding of their lifeworlds. My subsequent contact with the feminist movement and the research on women's lives that ensued provided the impetus for me to question my earlier studies and set me on the trail towards realising that understanding the lived experience is crucial to effectively 'seeing' women's lives.

The lack of literature on the enjoyable, leisure-like experiences of midlife women, the negative stereotypical images of menopausal women portrayed in the media and my own experience of being a midlife woman all led me to chose this cohort of women on which to do my research. As a midlife woman, I was concerned that the dominant cultural stereotypes of midlife women seemed to be all negative. The use of expressions such as "disease" and "climactic vulnerability", "begins to make one feel a little tetchy!" (Society for Research on Women in New Zealand 1988, p. 36) and conjures up images of helpless, old crones. The research of feminists such as Coney (1991), Greer (1991) and Doress & Siegal (1989) has exposed many of the myths of menopause and revealed concern about the interventionist approach now being taken by the medical profession. The stereotypes include the notion of midlife women being at the mercy of their oestrogen deficiency as they grow older, as evidenced by the increasing medicalisation of menopause. This medical approach, which involves the increasing use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), has the potential to make women feel powerless because of the difficulty of making their own decisions amidst the conflicting evidence and information regarding the safety and effectiveness of this treatment.

The significance of menopause cannot be overlooked but neither is it necessary to frame the whole of midlife women's lives in terms of their bodies' response to this physiological stage. Other myths include the belief that women are likely to have a midlife crisis because of the change from having dependent children to coping with the 'empty nest' syndrome. But as George (1980), quoted in Smith & Moen (1988) found, this is not substantiated in the literature, and she concludes by commenting that of all the changes and role transitions common in midlife "the empty nest

transition is probably the most expected ... and the most likely to be prepared for" (p. 84).

Because western culture has a long legacy of ageism and older women are often regarded as invisible it is not surprising that many of these women fear growing old and regard themselves as being over the hill at forty (Fodor & Franks 1990). They are not being seen by society as developing other aspects of themselves – as experimenting with new roles, experiencing enjoyment and leading healthy, fulfilling lives. But the outlook of some women in midlife is different. The midlife women I encounter in my personal and professional life, while being concerned about some of the issues of ageing, also appear to be making changes, developing new interests and looking forward to the next stage of their lives. They are thus consciously or unconsciously resisting the traditional stereotypes of midlife. Although not all of these women are engaged in exciting new experiences they are realising that there are alternatives to the traditional, stereotypical roles of middle-aged women for them to explore.

Midlife can be seen as a stage that includes a 'reckoning experience', where women re-evaluate their lives and roles and make decisions as to what they want, how they want to behave, what is important for them and where they want to focus their energies during the next decades. This could be an ongoing process that takes many years, or it could be a transition that is short-lived. The so-called midlife crisis can instead be manifested in terms of "a creative process that awakens women to new possibilities for being" (Vickers & Thomas 1993, p. 3). These women are in the act of 'composing their lives' (Bateson 1989), taking into account past experiences and making decisions that place enjoyment for themselves as a high priority for the rest of their lives.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to challenge the negative stereotypical images of midlife women as well as to investigate and develop a framework in which to situate midlife women's enjoyable lived experiences. I began my research by exploring the theories of leisure, including the traditional approaches based on the work/leisure dichotomy; early feminist approaches based on structural theories; and, finally, the poststructuralist/postmodernist feminist discourses that have been developed during the last two decades. Although these later feminist theories have had an impact on

our understanding of the gendered nature of leisure and the constraints women face they do not appear adequately to explain this dimension of how midlife women live their lives in a patriarchal and capitalist world. Nor do they take into account other factors – such as health and wellbeing, the affect of menopause and the media stereotypes– that impinge on women and their experience of being in midlife.

Feminist theories of health/illness have been developed (Broom 1991; Martin 1987; Lupton 1994; Ripper 1994), which argue for a more holistic model of health and wellbeing. But while these theories do challenge the dominant bio-medical approach to health which traditionally does not include the social and environmental factors relating to health/illness, they do not necessarily frame their work to include any recognition of the importance of enjoyment in women's lives. As a result, feminists working in the leisure field have failed to take relevant health aspects into account, while feminists in the health field appear to have ignored the leisure/recreation concepts. The exclusion or bracketing out of these vital components has meant that a holistic, multilayered view of women's lifeworlds has not been achieved in either of these theoretical perspectives. To research these aspects of women's lives in isolation may not only reinforce societal notions of fragmentation of life but also ignores the grounds upon which women construct their sense of self.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research is based on feminist theory informed by phenomenology. Instead of regarding leisure, health and wellbeing as separate and unrelated, the phenomenological concepts of lived experience and lifeworlds enabled me to see the women's lives as a whole and to explore the way midlife women experience the world. Phenomenology questions the meaning of everyday life experiences but does not necessarily offer theoretical alternatives with which to explain the world. Research informed by phenomenology does not allow for generalisations but is concerned rather with the uniqueness of human experience. Given that this piece of research is based on feminist principles, focus on the individual participant's lived experience are particularly appropriate. Because I was concerned to avoid an approach that fragmented the women's lives, my initial question entailed asking the women to recollect and describe an enjoyable experience. This approach was designed to cut across the separate and often inappropriate concepts of leisure, health and general wellbeing

and enable a more holistic understanding of these experiences to be developed.

The procedure for analysing the data, using the phenomenological method, followed a series of stages, as described in Chapter Four. Each stage of the analysis procedure is designed to make sense of the data so that the world of the participant is clearly understood. In Appendix B there is a detailed, step-by-step analysis of a section of one of the interviews.

This research aims to develop descriptions of midlife women's lives that are based on their own accounts of their lived experiences, their lifeworlds. These descriptions will be derived from their accounts of enjoyable experiences and their understanding of the affect on them of menopause and other related aspects of their life. The stories have been analysed to determine individual themes and any possible common themes that emerged, in order to provide an alternative to the predominant stereotypes of women in midlife.

THE THESIS JOURNAL

As part of the process of researching and of writing this thesis I kept a journal where I recorded random thoughts, ideas and suggestions about theory, methodology and points for discussion, as well as a log of my progress and general comments and concerns about doing the research and writing a thesis. Over the years this has provided useful insights into my reflections regarding the topic and also has served as a source of ideas as I have written up the research. I was often surprised to find, when I looked back to my journal, that I had already sorted out a solution to a particular aspect of the study that had given me several sleepless nights.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

Chapter Two reviews the literature on leisure. It incorporates the body of knowledge, developed mainly by social science researchers, to understand the meaning of leisure and includes a review of the various feminist theoretical perspectives as they are applied to leisure.

Chapter Three develops the theoretical framework for the thesis. It introduces two models of health, the medical and the social, and reviews these with particular attention being given to midlife women's health and the impact of menopause. A social psychological theory of enjoyment

known as flow, relating to a state that can lead to optimal experiences, is also introduced and discussed. A further two related concepts are brought in, a 'flow lifestyle' and women being engaged in the act of 'composing their lives', and these lead to the final model that brings together the various aspects of women's lived experiences.

Chapter Four discusses the importance of choosing a suitable methodology to enable me, through interviews, to access the lived experiences of the participants in the study. An interactive approach based on feminist principles of research was chosen. The phenomenological method proved to be an appropriate way of exploring the women's understandings of their lived experience of midlife, and in particular their enjoyable experiences and their experience of menopause.

Chapter Five introduces the thirty women participants and gives a brief description of each. There is a section on the context and background in which these women grew up and began their adult lives which for many included getting married and having children. A discussion of some of the issues that arose in relation to conducting the interviews and the women's responses is also presented in this chapter.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight present the findings elicited from the transcripts of the interviews. These are arranged in the form of themes and sub-themes, illustrated by direct quotes from the women. Chapter Six presents the responses regarding leisure and health while Chapter Seven is concerned with the women's descriptions of enjoyment and flow. Chapter Eight brings together the findings related to 'composing a life' and 'the dream for the future'.

Chapter Nine is the discussion and conclusion of the thesis. The themes that evolved from the transcripts are discussed in relation to the theories and the theoretical framework presented in Chapters Two and Three. It returns to the personal narrative which began the thesis, to demonstrate how both the sense of an enjoyable integrated life arising in the women's narratives in the findings chapters, and the theoretical drive towards a holistic vision of their lived experience, occurs as much in my own experience as in those of my research subjects.

Appendix A provides a socio-historical overview of the colonisation of Australia by Britain which began in 1788 and outlines, albeit very briefly, some of the milestones regarding women's history, establishing some background to the position of women in Australia in the 1990s. Although some of this experience could be seen as universal, especially the developments of the feminist movements and the experiences of women in both the war and post-war years, there are some important differences, particularly in South Australia relating to early emancipation, health and welfare policies and the impact of an outdoor culture in a hot climate. These factors have influenced the choices South Australian women make about what leisure activities to engage in and provide a context for the particular choices made by women in my study. This Appendix also has an overview of South Australia to provide the geographical context of the study.

Appendix B contains the detailed, step-by-step analysis of a section of one woman's interview transcript.

Appendix C contains a copy of the research letter and participants' ethical consent form.

Appendix D contains a copy of the advertisement in *Liberation*, September 1992.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORIES OF LEISURE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the literature on the evolving theories and meaning of leisure, beginning with the more traditional approaches, and proceeds to an analysis of the various feminist perspectives that have been used to re-examine theories of leisure.

The study of leisure by academics during the 1970s in the United Kingdom and the United States, and to a lesser degree in Australia, produced a number of theories of leisure. Many of these theories, developed predominantly by sociologists, were based on functionalist frameworks that regarded leisure as the antithesis of paid work (Parker, 1971; Roberts, 1970). This early approach was based on meanings and values attributed to work in Western culture: leisure was defined as a block of time separate from and contrasting to work (Brightbill, 1960; Kelly, 1974). The theories that developed were based on the assumptions that people's lives were divided into discrete parts and people worked in paid employment in order to enjoy life away from the work-place. Accordingly, studies of the relationship between paid work and leisure and of the concept of leisure time dominated early research.

These initial approaches to leisure theory have been subsequently challenged and critiqued by many academics from various disciplines and perspectives, but in particular by feminists from sociology (Deem 1986; Wimbush & Talbot 1988; Wearing 1990; Green *et al.* 1990), social psychology (Henderson *et al.* 1989, 1996) cultural studies (Gray 1992) and women's studies (Betschild 1995; Burden 1991).

TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF LEISURE

The founding fathers of the sociology of leisure in Britain (Green *et al.* 1990) theorised and wrote in the 1970s in a pre-feminist, sexist society. These men, writing at a time when second wave feminists were beginning to demand greater rights, did not take account of gender and other differences of race, culture or age (Green *et al.* 1990; Deem 1988). The concept of leisure was therefore developed with reference to men's experience of the family and the workforce, and reflected their perspectives and priorities. This androcentric approach advanced an artificial dichotomy between paid work and leisure (Bella 1989), which provided the basis for developing leisure theory.

In this research on leisure there was an underlying acceptance of the division of labour theory which constructs women's lives in terms of the private sphere, the home, and the family (Hargreaves 1989). There was little acknowledgement or understanding of gender, gender relations and the issues surrounding unpaid work in the home which was done predominantly by women – nor of the double shift, entailing paid work in the workplace as well. Women's leisure was subsumed as part of family leisure, an unproblematic arena (Green *et al.* 1990; Deem 1988), and when women became more visible in the workplace, the public sphere of men, they were viewed as a problem rather than offering another perspective from which leisure could be studied (Stanley 1980).

In a capitalist society paid work is regarded as the basic economic currency and full-time employment in the workforce is seen as the ideal. Men who work in the paid workforce gain a sense of identity as well as the right to leisure away from their work environment. In the 1970s women were not regarded as part of this ideal, appearing rather as adjuncts to men in their roles as wives or mothers. They were seen ideologically as being confined to the private sphere of home and family despite the number of women who were in the paid workforce. This was the socio-economic background in which male authors developed their early theories of leisure for example Parker (1971) and Roberts (1970) in the United Kingdom, and Brightbill (1960), Kelly (1974), Kaplan (1975) and Neulinger (1976) in the United States.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s predictions were made regarding the emergence of a society of leisure. The better conditions for paid workers, including the forty-hour week, full employment and more disposable income, led Roberts (1970) to suggest that Britain had become a society of leisure because

the choice of activities that people make in their free time develops their sense of identity, and leisure thereby is accorded the power to reciprocate that influence that other institutions have upon it.(p. 101).

He also claimed that "the discipline of sociology is value free; its principle job is to describe and explain how people in particular social situations use their leisure" (p. 9). This was based on an activity model whereby leisure was assessed according to the choice of activity. Robert's position was later commented on by Parker (1976) as being "fairly cautiously worded" and a "rather unrealistic ideology" (p. 147) which did however, provide a sense of how leisure was being defined. Developing his own theories, Parker (1976) related leisure to paid work and acknowledged that the experiences of work and leisure "by individual people have to be looked at against a social and economic background of the larger community" (p. 11). In Parker's view "people's lives are split into

different areas of activity", which he claims as a holistic position maintaining that "society is essentially an integrated whole, every part of which affects and is affected to some degree by every other part" (p. 99). Both these men ostensibly used the word 'people' to signify all people, but in reality they were only referring to men's lives.

The concept of 'life space' was put forward by Parker (1971) to include both work and leisure components and to incorporate the "total activities or ways of spending time that people have" (p. 25). He does acknowledge his sexism in this process when he agrees that "we have had in mind only men in full-time employment" (p. 29). He also makes the assumption that all adults work (or at least 70%) but acknowledges that

an analysis of life space based on this majority would be incomplete if it could not be amended to take account of the minority who are not in a full-time occupation (p. 29).

In this minority he includes "four groups of 'non-workers': prisoners, housewives, the unemployed, and the 'idle rich'" (p. 29). Here he exposes his androcentric position when he refers to similarities, in terms of constraints on leisure, between the housewives in Gavron's *The Captive Wife* (1966) and prisoners. Parker maintains the view that because of the nature of her work obligations a housewife is restricted in her choice of leisure activities. He uses the analogy of a prisoner in jail and does not allow for differences in the way women may perceive their leisure. While not reaching any definite conclusion Parker (1971) maintains that "the important thing is to make available opportunities for rewarding work and for the various kinds of leisure that complement rewarding work" (p. 142-3) arguing that it is the individual's choice as to how much advantage is taken of these opportunities.

The idea that paid work influences the kinds of leisure that the worker is involved in, was also discussed extensively by Roberts (1978), who included the homemaker within his conceptualisation of leisure. This attempt to introduce women into his conceptual framework faltered when he tried to incorporate the notion of leisure being time free from obligations (Bella 1989). Dumazedier (1967) described leisure as apart from the "obligations of work, family, and society" (p. 16), whether it be relaxation or a diversion. Dumazedier also attempted to incorporate women into his conceptual framework, but found the issue of women's domestic responsibilities a problem.

Neulinger (1976) was concerned with the way free time had become conceptualised as a container that was filled up with activities. He called this a

residual definition of leisure, where "activities became leisure, not because of their intrinsic characteristics, but because they are carried out during a period of time designated as leisure or free time" (p. 7). In contemplating issues of time (leisure time and free time) and activity, Parker (1971) asserts that both are '*dimensions of work and leisure*' (p. 25). He is critical of Brightbill (1960) who advocated that "leisure is time beyond that which is required for existence ... is discretionary time, the time to be used according to our own judgement of choice" (p. 4). Neither of these men take account of the overlap that may occur between necessary and discretionary activities.

De Grazia (1962) differentiated between free time and leisure commenting that "[a]nybody can have free time", because it is realisable, but leisure is not necessarily so. Leisure "refers to a state of being, something personal, a state of mind or a quality of feeling" (p. 59) and not necessarily free time away from work. Kaplan (1975) elaborated the following essential elements of leisure as being an "antithesis of work: a pleasant expectation and recollection"; a "minimum of involuntary social-role obligations"; aspects of freedom and cultural values, and possibly an activity "characterised by the element of play" (p. 22). Parker (1971) suggests that these essential elements of Kaplan's (1975) definition are "too broad to be useful" (p. 23), but many might disagree, regarding both De Grazia and Kaplan as forerunners of later, more flexible definitions of leisure.

As mentioned earlier, the accepted meaning of leisure during this time was based on male experience and perceptions of leisure (Neulinger 1976; Young & Willmott 1973). The definitions included the elements of pleasure, relaxation and an absence of obligations and pressures but, as Shaw (1985 a) states, "it is not clear how reliable these findings are or whether individuals are providing personal definitions or perceived societal definitions" (p. 3). These traditional leisure theories lacked breadth, depth and inclusivity and failed to address the issues that feminists (and others) have subsequently raised concerning the social, political and cultural implications of the concept of leisure. These theories assumed that men's and women's lives were segmented into separate divisions of work and leisure and did not consider the different experiences of women.

Australian research into leisure began in the 1970s. David Mercer's (1974) work provided an exception to the gender-blind research of many of these male theorists. His research included an examination of issues concerning the socially disadvantaged including women, and he also drew attention to the lack

of awareness by local, state and federal agencies of women's rights to recreation.

He argues that

leisure is not a residual category left over when all other 'non-leisure' time and activities have been subtracted; rather, it is an attitude of mind which can pervade any activity ... leisure-time pursuits involve freedom of choice and lack of coercion.(p. 269).

Unlike the other men researching leisure in the 1970s, Mercer's perspective on women's leisure took into consideration the multiple roles of women, their unpaid work in the home and a range of pleasurable, leisure-time pursuits – such as playing with the children, cooking, driving or chatting with a friend. He took the traditional leisure concepts of time, activity and experience and placed them in a context that acknowledged gender as a key issue in understanding leisure. Mercer's more women friendly perspective could be seen as a direct response to pressure from the women's movement in Australia (Mercer's partner at the time was a well-known Australian feminist, Jan Mercer, who was editor of the book, *The Other Half: Women in Australian Society*, 1975).

DEVELOPING THEORIES OF LEISURE FROM FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

The political activity of the women's movement in the mid to late 1970s and the emergence of women's studies in tertiary institutions led to the development of feminist theories and critiques by feminist academics on gender issues in the social science and humanities disciplines. Many aspects of women's lives were being examined and researched by the second wave feminists in various countries around the world. Analyses from different feminist perspectives included issues regarding rape (Brownmiller 1975), women and self (Miller 1976), birth control (Gordon 1976), mother-daughter relationships (Friday 1979), teen-age girls' lives (McRobbie 1978; Lette & Carey 1979) and work-force concerns regarding maternity leave (Lynch & Tiffin 1979). There were also feminist historical perspectives of the colonisation of women in Australia (Summers 1975; Dixson 1976), women's personal journeys towards becoming "full persons in our society" (Rogers 1980) and a best-selling novel about the reality of women's lives *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French, published in 1978. Although none of these texts specifically addressed leisure, they did address many of the concerns which women had about their lives and their personal relationships: material constraints of economics, time, geographical location and qualifications and skills, as well as ideological constraints which affected their choices of enjoyable activities.

Feminists researching in the leisure field were mainly social scientists, coming from a sociological or social psychological position. There were also some women who had a physical education and recreation background who were involved in the practical implications of a male-dominated field of study and practice. While these feminists came from different practical and theoretical positions their research reflected the need to combine theoretical and emancipatory approaches that were advocated by feminists in other disciplines. This small group of women from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States began to question the concept of leisure as espoused by the traditional male theorists. The theoretical positions that were developed were based on women's oppression, gender roles and gender relations and the powerlessness imposed on them by the dominant social structures. This added another dimension to the understanding of women's position and experience in society as well as providing the basis for new policies that increased girls' and women's opportunities for recreation and leisure.

Early work: a challenge to the traditional theories of leisure

In the United Kingdom, key papers and reports on women and leisure were written by two feminist sociologists, Stanley (1977, 1980) and Talbot (1979). Stanley (1980), examining issues of sex and gender, was critical of the 'leisure studies approach' as it related to women arguing that feminism had had no impact on this approach. Stanley acknowledged the contribution that feminism could make (in terms of different perspectives and techniques) in the understanding of leisure for women's lives and experiences but pointed out that the lack of feminists in the leisure studies field was a major limitation in addressing "the problem of women". The problem of women and leisure was not so much that of women, Stanley (1980) suggested, but rather of the more traditional, sexist, social science methodologies used to study leisure and women. She concluded that further research on topics such as the fragmentation of women's experience of time, policing public places and commercial leisure provision, needed to be addressed, with the added dimension of:

focusing research on women's interpretations of, constructions of, each of these dimensions of leisure experience. It is, in effect, a requirement to investigate all aspects of all women's experiences of all facets of social reality.(p. 35).

Talbot's review entitled *Women and Leisure: A State of the Art Review* (1979) took the form of a report for the Sports Council-Social Science Research Council Joint Panel on Sport and Leisure Research. This comprehensive review of relevant studies and findings on women provided important ground-work in which to review women's position regarding leisure. It also served to illustrate "how fragmentary and second hand is much of the evidence relating to women and leisure" (p. 30). Talbot, like Stanley, asserted that researchers needed to:

return to basic questions, to ask women what they do, when, where, with whom and in what spirit; to observe their social situations and the dynamic interaction of women with their cultural surroundings, (p. 30).

In Australia, Anderson's *Leisure - an inappropriate concept for women?* (1975) was the first large-scale survey published in the world. It was conducted by women about women's lives and their leisure. This was a report on a survey conducted in Melbourne in 1974 for the YWCA. 1073 women were interviewed, aged between 16 and 45 years. As stated in the Introduction:

the initial purpose of this study was to examine women's needs in regard to their leisure time and activities. Leisure time was naturally taken to be the time left over when all the work was done and leisure activities were assumed to be what women choose to do in that time (p. 1).

Given that this approach espoused the male model of leisure, that of time left over after work, it was not really surprising that the researchers had difficulty in understanding women's perceptions of such a concept. Generally, the women in this study described their lives in terms of their children and husbands; their own leisure was fitted in after everyone else was attended to, or extracted from broader family activities. This attitude, that women "should be satisfied with a home and family and not need interests apart from this" (Anderson 1975, p. 64) had ramifications for how women regarded their own free-time and leisure. Women who did take time for their recreation, whether home-based or in the community, tended to experience feelings of guilt or selfishness because, as Anderson (1975) explained

they feel they are neglecting their duties to their family and as well because they are aware that they are not completely fulfilled in the role of wife and mother (p. 64).

In the context of time and activity, leisure was not seen as an appropriate concept for women. Their conclusion, from a liberal feminist position, stated that:

If women are ever to achieve their true equality with men it is essential that they recognise the full extent of the economic and social discriminations and disadvantages they inevitably experience as women (p. 65).

Despite Anderson's (1975) survey, and the insights and recognition of women's position (Stanley 1977; Talbot 1979) leisure research still tended to be focused around predominantly white male employment patterns assuming that (men's) leisure activity occurred after paid work (Bernard & Meade 1993; Green *et al.* 1990). The initial inclusion of gender divisions in the leisure debate was often the "add women and stir" approach as extolled by Parker (1983). Parker had difficulty in accepting gender differences in leisure patterns because of his focus on the leisure of full-time paid workers. He appeared to view women's leisure as "different from men's [only] if they are not involved in paid work outside the home" a view critiqued by Green *et al.* (1990, p. 15) This reinforced both the traditional concept of leisure as being free from paid work and the segmentation of life into work and leisure.

Malestream theories of leisure had accepted the concept of a universal leisure experience where women's leisure was similar to men's leisure (Bella 1990; Henderson 1990). By only focusing on the type of activities that constitute leisure and the inequality of leisure time and space, leisure theory was neglecting issues of women's oppression, the way women experience leisure, and whether women have any leisure at all (Wearing & Wearing 1988).

Feminist theories and leisure

The following section summarises the various feminist theoretical approaches that have developed in the 1980s and 1990s and suggests how feminist leisure researchers have applied these perspectives to further their theoretical understanding of women's leisure. They challenge the gender-blindness of traditional leisure theories that situated all women in the private sphere of the home and consequently ignored the way women lived their lives. There is also an underlying awareness of male power in controlling women's lives and its effect on women's access to leisure.

While acknowledging that there is not a **single** feminist approach, an accepted position amongst feminists would be based on the principle that women as a group have been oppressed, disadvantaged and devalued in most western societies. There is also an understanding of the importance of placing women at the centre of any research and analysis. Feminist leisure researchers, for example Deem (1986), Wimbush and Talbot (1988), Green *et al.* (1990), Bella (1989), Henderson *et al.* (1989) and Wearing (1990), whilst reflecting the different theoretical perspectives of liberal, radical, socialist and poststructuralist feminism, have all expressed their agreement with these basic feminist positions. In all these feminist theories, power is basic to

the interpretation of the cause of gender difference and its impact on women in terms of their oppression. Men have more power than women and because such power is structural in origin, it is fixed. As Wearing (1996) states "in the power stakes men always win" (p. 9).

Because women's lives are bound by gender role obligations and social control mechanisms (Woodward & Green 1988) the need to understand and analyse gender and gender relations emerged as a dominant feminist approach in the 1980s (Henderson *et al.* 1996). Feminist research in the sport, leisure and physical education fields was acknowledged by academics in Women's Studies when a special edition of *Women's Studies International Forum* (1987) was published on these areas, indicating an awareness of the "significance of leisure as an arena for negotiation of gender power relations" (Burdon 1993, p. 164). Feminism is regarded as both personal and political, and therefore research on women's leisure needed to focus not only on the validity of women's experience but also on an examination of how women understand and endeavour to change their own lives from their oppressed and subordinate position in society (Henderson *et al.* 1996). Scraton (1992) also advocated that girls' experiences of physical education also needed to be viewed within a "sexual division of leisure" according to class and to the different opportunities as well as access to resources available after school for involvement in physical activity.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism is aligned with theories of individual rights (Tong 1989). Traditionally liberal feminists maintained that women were equal to men with complementary differences and that most women could liberate themselves from their gender roles and conditioning and have access to equal rights and opportunities. Some of the early goals of this movement included: equal employment opportunity for women, equal property rights and equal educational access. The focus on gender justice and reform was manifested in the ways liberal feminists endeavoured to improve the status of women from within society's systems and institutions. By not attempting to change or challenge these structures they appeared to acknowledge that the "full equality of women could be accommodated within the framework of monopoly capitalism" (Eisenstein 1984, p. 135). Because power was not regarded as a result of gender relationships it was deemed possible for capable women to achieve positions of influence and power by increasing their educational level and their assertiveness: in other words, provided

they were given equal opportunity and freedom of choice they could attain and maintain equality with men.

This theoretical position of liberal feminism does not admit that men and women do not begin equally in families, where limitations of both class and gender are placed on women (Wearing 1996). The question as to whether all women wish to aspire to have equal rights in the current system, and thus significantly to compromise their roles as wife and mother, has been debated. Jaggar (1983) suggested that liberal feminists were too quick to adopt male values and standards with the subsequent outcome "that "male" becomes "human"" (Henderson *et al.* 1996, p. 77). Jaggar (1983) was also critical of the liberal feminists' emphasis on the ability of humans to act rationally and autonomously and because these traits were regarded as superior, they thus devalued the nurturing and caring roles of women. The real life experiences of women are not accounted for in liberal feminism. Women cannot be regarded as one group, they are not equal to each other. There are great differences between women of different racial, class, age and ethnic backgrounds which are not accommodated in traditional liberal feminist theory. Despite its critics, the liberal feminist perspective has enabled changes to be made within many of society's structures by challenging and changing laws (for example equal opportunity legislation) and developing more appropriate education and work practices that have improved the quality of life for many women.

In Australia liberal feminism enabled a significant minority of women, described by Dixon (1976) as "the most articulate, activist and/or the most initially privileged" (p. 23–24), to gain positions in middle management and in government, at both federal and state levels. Whether these women (femocrats) become coerced into the corporate sector and change their feminist ideals of autonomy and initiative among women is debatable.

Another dimension of the liberal feminist leisure debate was the connection between health and leisure which was raised by Williams (Betschild) in a paper presented to a Women's Studies Association Conference in 1979. Williams posed the question whether women are being denied the opportunity to lead healthy lives because of the lack of opportunity to pursue a form of recreation that is self-fulfilling. This connection between health and leisure, although implicit in some analyses, had not been adequately researched by leisure researchers to this point.

In the area of sport, liberal feminists were concerned with equal opportunity and more recently equity to enable girls and women to have similar opportunities and resources as boys and men. As Hall (1996) argues when discussing liberal approaches to sports equity, "they do not always see as problematic the fundamental nature of male-defined sport with its emphasis on hierarchy, competitiveness and aggression" (p. 91). This perspective also regarded all girls and women as a homogeneous category with no recognition of difference.

In the 1980s liberal feminism was the dominant theory that could be applied to the majority of feminist leisure research although a socialist perspective was also evident in the analysis of women's experiences of leisure. A basic tenet in this research was that leisure is the right of all women and they are entitled to equal opportunities to engage in leisure. Henderson *et al.* (1989) suggested that this would include removal of gender-role restrictions, having a free choice, and by enabling women to regard leisure as a right, giving the potential for women to become empowered in other aspects of their lives. By examining women's position and their oppression feminist leisure researchers revealed the constraints, lack of entitlement and freedom on women's choices as well as the possible consequences of these issues as they related to women's potential for leisure (Bialeschki & Henderson 1986; Deem 1986; Woodward & Green 1988). Because of their role obligations women were not entitled to leisure (Anderson 1975; Henderson *et al.* 1989). Wimbush & Talbot (1988) suggested that women who worked for pay and/or worked at home had the right to take time off from their paid or unpaid work for leisure. Many women did not feel they had time for leisure because of the double work shift where they were responsible for domestic work and child care as well as for their paid work (Green *et al.* 1990; Wimbush & Talbot 1988).

Radical feminism

This theoretical approach is based on the belief that women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. Patriarchy, the systematic subordination of women, is a central tenet of radical feminism. Radical feminists suggest that gender itself is that most important source of power which has been socially constructed as a way to keep women subordinated to men. They have directed attention to the prominence of male domination over women, especially women's bodies (Tong 1989). This focus on the way men have attempted to control women's bodies has led to a focus on the social construction of sexuality and much of the research by radical feminists

has been on issues surrounding sexuality, including rape, domestic violence, and pornography, as well as childbearing and childrearing.

Because of this unequivocal women-centred perspective (Hall 1996) radical feminists attempted to go further than liberal feminism in challenging the patriarchal system, which Daly (1978) described as "the prevailing religion of the entire planet" (p. 39). Subsequent researchers have not only developed a sophisticated understanding of sexuality as being the main cause of women's oppression (MacKinnon 1995; Rich 1981; Lenskyj 1986) but have also made substantial contributions to women's culture, creating and celebrating women's art, literature, song, dance and ways that women enjoy being together (Tong 1989).

Bella (1989) from a radical feminist perspective was critical of the androcentric focus on leisure that had been built on men's experience of work and family relations and also assumed a "level of freedom from obligation rarely available to women" (p. 151). She argued that a new approach was needed that would place women's understanding and perceptions of their own lives as central rather than basing leisure research on androcentric and dichotomous concepts of work and leisure. Because leisure has been such a male-identified concept, Bella (1989) argued the need to find different research methods and approaches to describe and understand enjoyable experiences in the context of women's lives.

Lenskyj (1988) also took up the issue of androcentricism with regard to time and leisure. She discussed the differences between the experience of time for men and women and used the term 'ManTime' as being the norm and 'WomanTime' as the deviation. She was critical of the assumptions made by leisure researchers that did not apply a women-centred approach to understanding women's leisure. Because men are often able to allocate their time to work and leisure more easily than women this is often perceived as managing time more efficiently and effectively. In practical terms the double shift means women invariably do more than one activity at a time, and their time is seen not necessarily as rational, predictable or measurable. Research using a time budget approach also relies on 'ManTime' and this is not necessarily sensitive enough to examine the fragmentation and the multiple uses of women's time. Other research on leisure using check-lists (Robb & Howorth 1977; Cushman *et al.* 1991), raises similar problems of androcentricism. Lists of activities used in these surveys are usually based on specific sport and recreation pursuits which are central to men's lives

(Shaw 1985a) but do not include the different social and friendship groupings that are often the settings for women's leisure activities. The analyses of these studies has usually been related to gender differences in participation and have been criticised because the data are not sufficiently comprehensive to draw meaningful conclusion because of the multi-layered complexity of women's lives and leisure (Henderson *et al.* 1996).

Leisure experiences for women, based on a radical feminist perspective, include the women-only outdoor adventure and bush-walking trips that have become more prevalent in many Western countries. Some of these trips are

designed to focus on women's needs for skill development and usually encourage co-operation and caring friendships amongst group members and build a sense of autonomy and self-esteem (Henderson *et al.* 1996).

They also provide opportunities for participants to both explore and discover non-androcentric ways to experience leisure as well as enjoying themselves in the company of other women in a woman-friendly environment (Nanschild 1996; Kiewa 1994). These ventures also enable the participants to be physically active in a nonpatriarchal atmosphere where they can be free from oppressive gender role expectations. In sport, radical feminists have established women-only clubs, some specifically lesbian groupings, where rules can be modified to suit "feminist principles of participation, recreation, fun and friendship" (Hall 1996, p. 91).

A radical feminist perspective, as applied to the study of leisure, would mean that: "the context of women's lives would be studied completely separate (sic) from what leisure has typically meant as defined and operationalised by men" (Henderson 1990, p. 235).

Marxist and socialist feminism

The Marxist feminist view of leisure, while acknowledging the importance of gender and gender relations in women's oppression, asserts that class provides a better understanding for women's position and lack of power within the family and the division of labour. Socialist feminism evolved from the Marxist feminists' disillusionment with the gender-blind nature of Marxist thought where workers' oppression *per se* was more important than women's oppression (Tong 1989). The concept of patriarchy, which refers to the systematic organisation of male supremacy and female subordination, is common to both socialist and radical feminist theory. Socialist feminists are concerned about the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. Dual

system theorists (Mitchell 1971; Hartmann 1976) assert that patriarchy and capitalism are separate phenomena and that each must be analysed first before examining how they relate to each other. Unified system theorists (Young 1981; Jaggar 1983) view the two concepts as one and as Tong (1989) comments:

(T)his is an even more ambitious form of socialist feminism than is the dual-systems approach, for if there is *one* lens through which all of the dimensions of women's oppression can be filtered, then it may be possible to unite *all* of the feminist perspectives [including liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist] (p. 175).

There appears to be no theoretical analysis yet which satisfactorily explains the contradictions which lie within and between patriarchy and capitalism (Wearing 1996).

Socialist feminism focuses on more theories of women's labour, domestic labour and the role of the state and less on the questions of sexuality and violence that concerned the radical feminists. In Australia, towards the end of the 1980s, socialist theory was regarded as having no relevance to feminism. As Pringle (1988) stated "'socialist-feminism' evokes a time and a set of conditions that are now gone" (p. 25). However, issues of class difference and conflict with the focus on women as paid and unpaid workers, and an analysis of the family and the economic dependence it creates, have increased the understanding of women's position in society. Not only class but also race and gender oppressions are all regarded as significant in understanding women's position with regard to power and status. Feminist leisure researchers (Green *et al.* 1990; Deem 1986) and others have challenged the view that class is the main issue affecting access to and participation in leisure. They identify questions of gender, and also race, as equally relevant.

Green *et al.* (1990), from a socialist feminist perspective, argue that leisure needs to be situated in its social context which they regard as fundamentally patriarchal and capitalist. They have also incorporated theories from cultural studies to investigate how leisure is "not only an area where social divisions structure access and experience, but is also an area where inequalities are negotiated, reproduced and challenged" (p. 37). Deem (1986) was concerned with the social system that places restrictions on women's social, political and economic power and the need for better leisure environments that are safe for all women. Leisure activities, conducted in all-female environments outside the home, have been studied by Dixey, (1988) who studied bingo, and Griffiths (1988), who studied young women and dancing. Wimbush and Talbot (1988) comment that although the women themselves all enjoy and feel comfortable and safe in these

environments they have also experienced their participation as being "derided or undervalued" (p. 87). This is an example of how women feel constrained by the structures of society that perpetuate the dominant values and beliefs that women's place is in the home and should not be invading men's public space of sporting venues, pubs and clubs.

However, it is not necessary to regard women as entirely powerless in the face of patriarchy and capitalism, as many of the structural feminist theories have shown. By researching women's leisure in the context of their lives as a whole Green *et al.* (1989), Deem (1986) and Wimbush and Talbot (1988) have all acknowledged the importance of women creating leisure opportunities through female friendships and networks in a more co-operative way.

Feminist research on leisure in the 1980s and 1990s has endorsed feminist theories regarding gender inequality, androcentricity and women's oppression as they relate to women's experience of leisure. These challenges to traditional leisure research made by feminist researchers (*viz.* Deem 1986; Wimbush & Talbot 1988; Henderson *et al.* 1989; Green *et al.* 1990) are grounded in assumptions that women's lives "are seen to be structured by gender within a society structured by patriarchal relations" (Scruton 1994, p. 52).

The effect on leisure of gender roles and gender obligations has been revealed by this feminist research but there is a need to study women's leisure within the context of diversity. Socialist feminist theories maintained that class, race and gender oppressions intersect to determine each individual's position of power and status but did not take account of individual difference. Although acknowledged as essential by Green *et al.* (1990) and Henderson *et al.* (1989, 1996), the effect of individual differences of class, ethnicity, culture, age and sexual identity on the leisure opportunities and experiences of women has not been adequately analysed. Research that takes account of these differences and does not regard all leisure experience as similar for all women and men would provide a richer and deeper analysis of the meaning and experience of women's leisure.

Black women and white feminism

For the last two decades black women have critiqued and contributed to feminist theory and practice. In the United Kingdom the critical work of black women theorists, such as Carby (1982) and Amos and Palmer (1984),

challenged the 'whiteness within the feminist movement' (Mirza 1997, p. 11). Carby (1982) pointed out that there was no single source of black women's oppression and that they are subjected to the '*simultaneous* oppression of patriarchy, class and 'race''. (p. 214). White feminist theory of the time posited the family, patriarchy and reproduction as key sources of women's oppression. Carby (1982) argued that it was problematic to simply transfer this perspective to the lives of black women. She asserted, for example, that the black family 'has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression' (p. 46). Black feminists in Britain in the 1980s responded to the 'overarching imperial mission of white feminism' (Mirza 1997, p. 11) and the neglect of black women's lived experiences by researching various aspects of their own lives. Subsequent research by black feminist theorists has focused on difference and the need to place black women's experience at the centre of the analysis (Aziz 1997; Helen (Charles) 1997).

British feminists Wimbush and Talbot (1988) and Green *et al* (1989) acknowledged the lack of research into the leisure experiences of ethnic minority groups in Britain and the lack of written material on black women's leisure. They also recognised the problems entailed in researching cultures other than one's own and the need to change the research methodologies to enable the diversity of black women's experiences to be identified (Green *et al* p. 20).

In Australia, over the last ten years, Aboriginal women including Felton and Flanagan (1993) and Huggins (1987) have argued that white feminists have not fully recognised the implications of racism nor the historical and political discrimination that Aboriginal women have faced. Aboriginal and non-Anglo immigrant women have been critical of both radical and socialist feminism for being 'anti-men', as well as, (particularly in the view of Aboriginal women), anti-family. Like black women in Britain, Aboriginal women have generally wanted to protect, not attack, the family because of earlier attempts by a white racist society to destroy Aboriginal families (Curthoys 1992). Over a period of decades, Aboriginal children had been systematically stolen from their parents to be raised by non-indigenous people (Sabbioni 1998, p. xxvii).

Most Aboriginal women were wary of the white women's movement, but did increasingly take opportunities to speak out, especially at conferences such as the 'Women and Labour' conferences (1982 & 1984), and the 1987

socialist feminist gatherings. Again, these Aboriginal women were concerned with the 'anti-male flavour'. 'They felt greater solidarity with their own men than with the white Anglo-Celtic Australian women who proclaimed universal sisterhood' (Curthoys 1992, p. 443). Most white Australian women had difficulty in accepting their role in the processes of racism and oppression of Aboriginal women, and were slow to understand the struggles and analyses presented (Goodhall & Huggins 1992).

A powerful form of exclusion of Aboriginal people from the Australian nation has been the rendering of them as invisible in various academic disciplines (Pettman 1988). Over the years Aborigines have suffered from others writing and talking about, and sometimes 'for' them. Academic researchers have been suspect 'either as individualistic parasites (who take their PhD and run), or as state-funded and possibly state-directed workers' (Pettman 1988, p. 13). Knowledge generated by academics may be used or misused by state agencies, or simply suppressed, leading Aborigines to ask why they should, yet again, co-operate for no return to themselves (Alexander 1987).

Although some white researchers have consulted Aboriginal people about their research priorities and negotiated issues of ownership and control of research material, most white researchers are only now beginning to learn about these issues. Because of some of the problems experienced with white researchers, two black women activists Felton and Flanagan (1993), have called for a Tidda's (Black women's) 'Manifesto' to 'articulate and analyse the factors that shape our reality' (p. 53). Although they are not saying that white women cannot talk about black women, they are asking white women to develop an ethical protocol and to refrain from attempting to speak on behalf of Tiddas. (For further discussion on this, see Chapter Nine, 'Issues arising in the research process').

Further development of feminist leisure theories

The three feminist theoretical positions, liberal, radical and socialist are structural theories and depend on reform or change of the social structures (including law, education, religion, the work force, media) and or eradication of the economic structures of capitalism. In many western countries during the 1980s changes have occurred in government legislation and policies to enable equal opportunity and access in many of the social structures of society. Anti-discrimination laws have also provided

opportunities for legal redress in many aspects of peoples' lives. The question remains as to whether these structural theories have oversimplified the "complex interrelationships of sources of power" (Wearing 1996, p. 30) and instead of enabling women to become empowered have encouraged women to see themselves as victims.

Poststructuralist and postmodernist critical theories provide feminists with another way of viewing the concept of gender and difference and the politics of individual resistance. These theories have also influenced feminists to, as Wearing (1996) further stated, "analyse the local, specific and particular in seeking to understand women's lives and women's experiences" (p. 31) as well as rethink the way that gender has been constructed in male-dominated western culture and western thinking. And Stanley and Wise (1993) state "'difference' has become the new watchword of feminist theory" (p. 13).

The two terms poststructuralism and postmodernism appear to have been used synonymously by some writers (Henderson *et al.* 1996). Huyssen (1990), while reluctant to define postmodernism because it "positions the phenomenon as relational" (p. 236), nevertheless does distinguish postmodernism as having its roots in cultural studies while poststructuralism is more aligned to critical theory. The two theoretical positions both rely on the writings of contemporary French philosophers such as Foucault (1977, 1983), Derrida (1973), Kristeva (1981), and Irigaray (1986). Wearing (1996) who has used the term poststructural theory extensively in her recent research (1992, 1994) relates her theories to all of these writers.

Poststructural theories challenge patriarchal structures and focus on the ways in which gender has become 'written in' to the subjective experience of self (Ripper 1996). Language is regarded as the common factor "in the analysis of social organisation, social meanings, power and individual consciousness" (Weedon 1987, p. 21). Language has operated to set up dichotomous categories that are hierarchical and function to devalue and marginalise one concept in relation to the other, for example male/female, mind/body, public/private. Feminist poststructuralists have demonstrated that these binaries are invariable gendered and hierarchical (Grosz 1989; Irigaray 1985).

According to Foucault (1977) people are never just victims, as individuals contained in their positions they can still choose to resist the discourses that

oppress them. Gender-biased discourses place women in the private sphere of the home as carers, and nurturers and these are regarded by society as commonsense positions for women. From a feminist poststructuralist position Weedon (1987) argues that these dominant discourses of power that maintain women in an oppressed state provide a position of resistance for individual women. Freysinger and Flannery (1992) in their study of midlife women state that feminist leisure research has "rarely addressed aspects of agency, individual consciousness or the possibility of resistance" (p. 305) and concluded that autonomy as well as the discovery of a different sense of self could be found in leisure and allege that women are thus engaged in acts of resistance.

Wearing (1996), in her more recent studies on gender and leisure, claims that "power and resistance are intertwined" in Foucault's (1977; 1980; 1983) work. She goes on to state "[the very presence of power] is dependent on the potential for resistance on the part of the less powerful" (1996 p. 34). By taking into account Foucault's work on resistance and its implications, research on women's lived experiences has the potential to be interpreted in a more positive way. Wearing (1990; 1994), McCann (1995) and New (1992) have used Foucault's theories to examine various aspects of women's lives including motherhood, grandmotherhood, growing old, leisure options and meaning, as well as differences of culture, race and class. This research has challenged the notion of leisure as an inappropriate concept for women and revealed a more optimistic understanding of these women's lifeworlds.

Previous leisure research has maintained 'woman' as a fixed identity and thus all women would be seen to share the same experience of being a woman, but as Spelman (1988) states "even if we say all women are oppressed by sexism we cannot automatically conclude that the sexism all women experience is the same" (p. 14). Differences between women undermine this homogeneity of women, "and so 'difference' has become an obligatory tenet in feminist discourse of the 1990s" (Ang 1994 p. 58). The notion of feminist pluralism supports Wearing's (1994) poststructural argument that the subject of woman is a socially constructed, fragmented and changeable subject with different experiences that "can encompass gender, race, class and sexuality without hierarchies of causation and political action" (p. 5). Wearing (1994) argues for a resignifying of leisure to include "non-exclusionary women's perspectives" (p. 7) and enable a space whether it be physical, mental or metaphorical, that all women have control and power to do with what they will. This space will also provide women

with opportunities to find enjoyment and restore a sense of themselves "beyond their male dominated socialisation and stereotypes" (p. 13). These spaces or leisure containers can also include type of activities, social settings, geographical location, solitary time, friendships and thus provide a link between individual (social psychological) and sociological factors (Henderson *et al.* 1996).

The work of these researchers (Wearing; Freysinger & Flannery; Henderson *et al.*) based on poststructural theory, emphasises the need to take account of the individual enjoyable experiences that women can access and the spaces in which they can take 'minute vacations' which Henderson *et al.* (1989) describe as "short periods during the day when women can take the time just to enjoy being alone" (p. 103). As Wearing (1994) concludes "leisure space as a resource ... has been minimally tapped as yet" (p. 13). Resistance is also a recourse for women to help them overcome the dominant discourses which can oppress their leisure needs but it may not be the only strategy. Women have been shown to have the ability to legitimise their rights to leisure and enjoyable experiences and also to be resourceful in claiming their own spaces (New 1992).

Although the acknowledgement of individual differences and the multi-positioning of women is a "very comforting ideology, especially if you are white, middle class and relatively comfortable" (Macdonald 1996, p. 50) some feminists are critical of the potential for postmodernism and poststructuralism to become elite, ivory tower, academic ideologies which bears no relation to the real world of most women (Tong 1989). These theories that have been proposed, developed and adapted by feminists provide partial explanations and understandings of women's position in western society but the reality is that individual women are still having to live their lives within a patriarchal and capitalist world. Concern is also being expressed regarding the important political role that feminism (Scruton 1994) as well as the women's liberation movement still needs to play (Macdonald 1996) in achieving a better style of living for all women.

Nevertheless, models of leisure that present work and leisure as binary oppositions do not provide appropriate ways of describing women's experiences. Many women no longer regard their work (whether paid or unpaid) as a separate sphere but rather as a more integral part of their lives. The separation of work from the rest of life might in fact be "a peculiar gender-linked trait" (Alison & Duncan 1988, p. 119). The question can also be

asked whether work is perceived as non-leisure or as an opportunity for women to develop themselves and gain self-esteem. The traditional dichotomy has led to confusion and alienation both on the part of researchers and women themselves regarding the concept of leisure and whether it is applicable for women. This does not mean that women do not experience leisure as Bella (1989) suggests, but because of this integration of leisure it may be difficult to identify since it does not occur at specified times or take the form of particular activities (Henderson *et al.* 1996).

There is considerable evidence that women do experience enjoyable times in their lives which could be described as leisure. Researchers have begun to acknowledge the uniqueness and different meanings of leisure for women. 'Leisure-like' experiences differ according to the context in which they take place and access to these experiences will depend on the social pressures, gender roles and obligations that are regarded as constraints on women in their pursuit of a leisure space and time. In an integrative review of international research on women's leisure over the last ten years, Henderson (1990a) concluded that:

a focus on women and the meaning they attach to the phenomena of leisure has provided richer and deeper questions that may be applied to all areas of leisure research (p. 240).

Insights from social psychology

While it was the work of sociologists that dominated the feminist theories of leisure in the United Kingdom, in North America it was the work of social psychologists, based on feminist psychology, that informed the leisure research. Feminist psychologists Miller (1976, 1986, 1990) and Gilligan (1982, 1987) developed theories which challenged the traditional psychological theories on relationships and human development. Miller (1976) was critical of psychology's androcentric approach in which women's development has been assumed to be the same as men's. There appeared to be no adequate 'language' to describe how women's sense of self was 'organised around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships' (p. 83). Gilligan built on Miller's theories and was concerned with the 'disparity between women's experience and human development' (p. 1). Her work revolved around issues of responsibility for, care of, and inclusion of other people, and the effect of these on a woman's sense of self. Social psychologists Henderson and Allen (1991) illustrated how women are more likely than men to exhibit an "ethic of care" that orients their leisure towards relationships with others. In a study on the 'common leisure

occasion' Samdahl (1992) found that informal social interactions had the possibility of greatly enhancing leisure experiences. By widening their understanding to include both psychological and social factors these North American leisure researchers (Samdahl 1992; Shaw 1985; and Henderson *et al* 1996), have developed a broader framework in which to understand leisure and women's lived experiences.

Feminist theories and lived experience

The early work by feminist sociological researchers, for example, Green *et al.* (1990), Deem (1986) and Wimbush and Talbot (1988), was valuable in providing a theoretical framework in which to view leisure in women's lives. The concept of patriarchy was central to their theoretical analysis and gender was identified as being as important as class and race in shaping women's experiences of leisure. There was also some recognition of differences amongst women including those relating to race, culture and ethnicity (Green *et al.* 1990) but this understanding has not been well developed empirically.

North American social psychologists (Henderson *et al.* 1989; Shaw 1985b) were concerned that the early research on leisure had not examined either the interrelationships between women's work inside and outside of the home, or the leisure patterns of women at different points in the life cycle. Their early research focused on constraints and entitlement to leisure, and the meaning of leisure for women (as distinct from men) and is only more recently developing the analysis of difference to include race and sexual orientation (Henderson & Ainsworth 1998).

Feminist leisure researchers, working in the 1980s, refined our understanding of women's lives in terms of how their time was structured and the effect of employment upon their leisure opportunities. This enabled them to challenge the traditional, androcentric concepts of leisure which positioned women as inferior because they differ from the male norm (Bella 1989) and provided research data which informed a better understanding of women's experiences of leisure. Generally they acknowledged the inadequacies of theories which suggest a universal understanding of leisure and leisure behaviour. However, despite some early recognition of the importance of 'differences' between women, none of the feminist leisure research specifically addressed these issues at an empirical level.

This study is designed to research midlife women's lifeworlds and their lived experience. The notion of leisure as a lived experience rather than a particular activity or period of time would appear to reflect the way women think about their own leisure in everyday life. Given that previous feminist leisure research from a sociological perspective has not adequately addressed this area, I have drawn on social psychological frameworks to explore the meanings of midlife women's experiences.

There are a number of important 'gaps' in our understanding of leisure, especially with regard to gender, which this study endeavours to address. Although enjoyment is acknowledged (Shaw 1985; Henderson et al 1996) as being a key aspect of women's lived leisure experience it has not featured as a topic for investigation by feminists. For example flow, a theory of enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1988) provides us with insights into the links between flow and leisure but fails to take account of difference. It consequently ignores gender and race, and needs exploring from a feminist perspective. Finally, although phenomenology usefully provides a method to access lived experience, again it provides little or no acknowledgement of gender.

SUMMARY

This chapter began with the traditional theories of leisure, developed prior to research by feminists on women's leisure. There followed a review of the various structural feminist theories and their application to women's leisure. These feminist theories have relied for the most part on malestream theories based on the dichotomy of public/private sphere to explain gender difference and women's position and do not adequately describe women's actual lived experiences. Theories that challenge these androcentric discourses that adhere to universal concepts of truth and objectivity need to be developed; this is necessary in order that women's knowledge and lived experiences can be incorporated into alternative theories of knowledge that take into account gender and difference and women's autonomy. The examination of time, activities and constraints alone does not increase the understanding or the meaning of women's leisure experience; rather they need to be examined in the context of women's everyday lives (Stanley 1988; Green *et al.* 1990).

Leisure has been constructed on positivist notions of work, time, activity which all have gendered connotations in western society. Poststructuralist feminism has embraced an "umbrella notion of "woman" which recognises both commonality and diversity between women and men, between women and within each woman" (Wearing 1996, p. 39). Rather than viewing all women as being oppressed, resistance, as depicted in Foucault's work, allows for a more adaptable and positive understanding of women's everyday experiences. Although poststructuralism seems to be an attractive theory and methodology which challenges the research of the previous structuralist theories there appears to be a number of overlapping theoretical approaches. Research into women's everyday lives and their personal and shared experiences has the potential to extend the debate and provide the groundwork for a model that encompasses their whole lifestyle. A theoretical approach and methodology is needed that deconstructs these categories and resignifies leisure in terms of the daily experiences of women's lives, their lived experiences and thus diffuses the work/leisure dichotomy as well as extending our research beyond the experiences of white, middle class women.

The following chapter is concerned with developing a theoretical framework in which to view midlife women's lives. Because various feminists leisure researchers have advocated the need to research women's lives holistically and not in a fragmented way the next chapter introduces theories of health, enjoyment and flow as a way of understanding the composition of women's lives as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

Feminist leisure research has challenged and confronted the social, political and gendered positions that have provided the framework in which to view leisure in people's lives. Nevertheless, there is a sense that these perspectives still confine women's stories about their lives and highlight leisure's inappropriateness as a concept for women (Betschild & Simmons 1996). Leisure research has overlooked the ways women's lives are integrated, so that to research leisure in isolation sets up artificial boundaries between leisure and the rest of life and also reinforces the notion of the fragmentation of women's lives. Feminists, for example, Green *et al.* (1990) and Scraton (1994), have stressed the need to examine women's leisure holistically, rather than as a separate segment of their lives. Although health, which includes wellbeing, would appear to be obvious components of leisure very little research has been done on any relationship between these two. The notion of enjoyment would appear to defy segmentation, it crosses the boundaries of work, leisure and health, and therefore this concept has been used to enable a more comprehensive approach to understanding women's lives.

Because this research is concerned with midlife women this chapter includes a section on feminist research on ageing and midlife as well as other aspects that need to be considered, such as health and wellbeing and the effect of menopause on these women's lives. By including these other theoretical approaches and removing the traditional boundaries around, for example health, leisure and enjoyment, further dimensions of midlife women's lived experience can be explored. A different research agenda is developed into a more inclusive framework that takes account of the many and various dimensions of midlife women's lived experience.

LEISURE AND HEALTH

Health is more than the absence of disease; it includes physical, mental and emotional wellbeing (World Health Organisation 1948), a definition which can be interpreted to link all aspects of people's lives. Health and wellbeing are thus dependent on social, psychological and physical factors (Bernard & Meade 1993). In recent years, while it has been accepted that physical activity

makes a major contribution to health and wellbeing (for example, Gibbs 1981; Rosenzweig 1982; Dubois *et al.* 1987), the relationships between health, wellbeing and leisure have not been adequately researched.

In an earlier paper, Williams (Betschild) (1979) was concerned that women were possibly being denied the opportunity to have healthy lives because of the lack of opportunity to pursue self-fulfilling forms of recreation. Howat *et al.* (1986) comment that "leisure is an integral component of health and can significantly influence health status" (p. 5). The South Australian organisation 'Living Health' demonstrates this integration of health and wellbeing in the following statements:

Health is: Enjoying life
Health is taking time
to relax, exercise, laugh
Health is taking time
to see friends, eat nutritious food
Health is taking time to
Enjoy being healthy (Living Health SA, 1996 Mission Statement).

Despite recognition of these apparently undeniable links, feminist leisure researchers have not specifically, or at least not explicitly, addressed the connections between leisure and health. Henderson *et al.* (1996) acknowledge that the benefits of leisure for women quite often go unnoticed and although they observe that "the physical benefits of participation in leisure are fairly obvious" (p. 116), very little attention is paid to this concept of leisure and health in their work. Whilst acknowledging that leisure involvement does contribute to mental and emotional health, Henderson *et al.* (1996) are uncertain "as to why the relationship between leisure and wellbeing exists" (p. 117). Although it is generally accepted that health is an integral part of people's lives (see later subsection on 'the lived body'), research on leisure rarely includes this dimension.

Models of health

Just as feminist theories on leisure have been developed using a range of different perspectives from a number of social science disciplines, similarly, feminist theories of health/illness have been developed in various disciplines, including sociology, medical sociology, anthropology and health psychology. Recent feminist research in these disciplines has begun to expand the understanding of health and illness problems from a range of theoretical and methodological positions. This research has been critical of the traditional health model that has been used by professional health workers.

The bio-medical model of health, which underpins Western medicine, is based on the understanding that there is a perfect physiological body. When this body shows symptoms of illness (imperfection) the disease is located within the person and the sources are conceptualised in terms of viruses or defects in the physical structure or function. The environment is only taken into account in terms of the individual being exposed to "infectious, toxic or injurious agents" (Broom 1991, p. 52). Treatment for these symptoms is by intervention, for example drug prescription or surgery (Ripper 1994).

This model assumes a passive patient, who is ignorant of her body and its functions and who is also subservient to the medical profession and its practices. She therefore relinquishes all power and control to the doctor(s). This model maintains the power and authority within the medical profession thus controlling and oppressing the patients who seek advice and 'treatment' (Betschild & Simmons 1996). The "medical culture has a powerful system of socialisation which exacts conformity as the price of participation" (Martin 1987, p. 13).

Each era and its culture has a taken-for-granted epistemology of what health means. In today's Western culture, women should be youthful, stable and rational; their bodies should not vary too much or have different patterns of bleeding or be incontinent. Any variability is in danger of being pathologised, especially once the medical profession is involved (Ripper 1994). Feminists have become increasingly disillusioned with the limitations of bio-medicine and have begun to question the effectiveness and accessibility of scientific medical knowledge. Feminist social scientists have argued that many elements of modern medical science have contributed to women's fragmentation and loss of wholeness: women come to regard their bodies as separate from their selves (Lupton 1995; Martin 1987; Ripper 1994; Broom 1991). Another important problem is that by regarding menstruation, menopause and birth as purely physiological and reproductive bodily functions, and treating them by mechanical manipulations and interventions, medical science ignores other aspects of the self, such as the emotions and relationships with other people (Martin 1987).

The women's health movement, by contrast, has argued for "a view of health as human wholeness" (Refshauge 1986, p. 21) and has stressed the need to acknowledge the legitimacy of women's own account of their bodily

experiences (Broom 1991). In keeping with this, more holistic models have been developed by feminist theorists (Martin 1987; Koeske 1983) and feminist health workers. In those models the relevance of social, cultural, environmental and economic factors in determining health and wellbeing is recognised as is the need to "reintegrate the whole person from the jigsaw of parts created by modern scientific medicine" (Koeske 1983, p. 13).

A social model of health positions women in social contexts; it recognises the relevance of the environment and understands health/illness as a process of interaction between the person and their environment (Broom 1991). Factors that are considered pertinent in this model include socio-economic status, occupation, gender, geographical location, ethnicity and religion as well as other cultural considerations. In addition, the power relationship between men and women, and its possible debilitating effect on women's health (Ripper 1994), is also considered relevant. This model not only incorporates the various factors mentioned above, but also endeavours to take into account women's own involvement and response to these factors. This could be described as an holistic model which incorporates more than the mere sum of the component factors.

Health workers who incorporate these models into their practice enable women to see the wider context in which their health can be located. Moreover, women are encouraged to take responsibility for understanding their health and to engage in political action to manage their health and wellbeing; thus in this way women gain more control over their bodies and their health. The following discussion on the body shows how a sense of embodiment can contribute to the development of self, and to the ways in which women experience themselves as embodied beings.

The lived body

The women's health movement emerged as a response to women's dissatisfaction with the biomedical model, which focused on women's physical bodies and ignored their 'lived bodies'. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1973) was an early definitive work on women's health. It not only provided women with information about their physiological functioning of their bodies but also presented women's own experiences of their health and wellbeing as being legitimate forms of knowledge (Gottlieb 1987).

But while the female body has been central to some feminist concerns – the feminist demand that women have the right to control their bodies, for instance – rarely has much attention been paid to *active* female bodies or sporting bodies. Feminists have not always "seen the relevance of physicality, or empowerment through physical activity, to feminist politics" (Hall 1996, p. 50).

Physical movement, such as walking, swimming or dancing, for example, evokes a sensation of physical wellbeing which arises from biochemical processes in the body. Biochemicals released in the brain include a group known as enkephalins, or endorphins (Beck & Beck 1987). They create euphoria and pain relief and provide an important link between the body and mind. The physiological functioning of the body, which includes the heart beating regularly and the lungs swelling and shrinking (Bland 1976), provides the corporeal rhythm that is integral to living. The connection between activity and the release of endorphins in the brain to create feelings of euphoria would appear to be the key towards understanding why participants in physical movement have the potential to "proclaim and celebrate the being and capabilities of their embodiment" (Whitehead 1990, p. 12). Embodiment is a term that describes the lived body; it is conceptualised as "a *becoming*" (Stanley & Wise 1993, p. 196), and never fixed. Whitehead (1990) further comments that "our bodily dimension is integrally involved in most aspects of our existence – not least in the establishment of a meaningful relationship with the world around us" (p. 3).

Dan *et al.* (1990) in a paper on 'Lifelong physical activity in midlife and older women' studied the role that physical activity has in the lifestyle and leisure of midlife women and whether low levels of exercise when they are younger results in increased risk for diseases associated with ageing, for example osteoporosis and coronary heart disease. They used quantitative measures in a three-year study to determine patterns of physical activity over the lifespan in a sample of 375 women aged between 33 and 62 years. Activity was divided into three categories: occupation, leisure and household, which acknowledged the different ways that women are involved in physical activity. They found that the overall "peak physical activity occurred from ages 25–39, with a rapid decrease after age 39" (p. 540). Although the study indicates that physical activity in the three categories drops after the age of 39, it is not clear whether this decline in physical activity does contribute to an increased bone mineral loss or to decreased

cardio-respiratory fitness. Because this was a quantitative study other dimensions, for example whether the women enjoyed their activity or whether they were aware of the physicality of their bodies, were not researched.

During the last decade health has become of major economic significance. Both government and private sectors have raised awareness among the people in most Western countries of the need for exercise to maintain fitness and general health and wellbeing. The value of physical education and health in the curriculum has the potential to provide students, from a young age, with the opportunity to develop skills in many different physical activities and experience enjoyment through movement (Scraton 1992). Unfortunately the drop-out rate of girls from sports and physical education in high school inevitably leads to decreased involvement in physical activity on the part of young women. This may be further exacerbated for women as they get older, if they continue to lead a relatively sedentary lifestyle which can lead to ill-health and increased dissatisfaction with their bodies as they gain weight (Adamson 1993). However, this situation has changed considerably over the last decade with many older women joining community walking groups for fitness and pleasure (Recreation for Older Adults 1995). These women find enjoyment in both the physical movement of walking, and in the social involvement with others, as well as gaining more specific health benefits which can include reducing the risk of heart attack and lower back pain (Stamford 1988; Gorman & Posner 1988).

Because people (and in this case women) choose to exercise their bodies, for both their health and enjoyment it would appear that maintaining good health practices leads to general feelings of enjoyment and wellbeing. Whether it is the increased flow of endorphins, mentioned previously, or other physiological processes, physical activity appears to have the potential to induce a state of happiness/enjoyment/wellbeing.

Leisure and health are not separate entities or segments of life; they need to be viewed as part of a whole. The following section introduces enjoyment as a concept that defies segmentation. A theory of enjoyment known as flow is then introduced to provide another approach from which to discuss lived experience.

ENJOYMENT

Although enjoyment and fun appear to be obvious components of leisure there is very little research that has incorporated these emotional dimensions to explore the concept of leisure.

Several studies have however indicated that enjoyment is indeed a key aspect of women's leisure experience. Bialeschki and Henderson (1986), as well as Shaw (1985a), found that the women they researched used the concept of enjoyment to explain what leisure meant in their daily lives. Henderson *et al.* (1996) argue that "the positive component of leisure can be conceptualised simply as enjoyment" (p. 107).

Is there a difference between enjoyment and fun and can they be used synonymously in this context? It would seem not. Women can apparently experience enjoyment in a range of situations, for example when they are taking time for themselves or being with friends and family (Hunter & Whitson 1991), whereas they rarely speak about having fun.

To explore the relationships between fun, enjoyment and leisure, Podilchak (1991) conducted in-depth interviews with 49 young adults: forty-five males and four females, with a mean age of seventeen. He found that enjoyment was regarded as being more serious than fun; that having fun relied on the participants losing a sense of self-consciousness, which could happen when interacting with equal peers. The attitude towards leisure was that while it should be fun, fun may not occur. This study provides some interesting distinctions between fun and enjoyment but his sample would not have allowed him to comment on any gender differences in relation to his findings since it included too few women to be able to do that.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1988, 1990), a social psychologist, has researched "how people felt when they most enjoyed themselves, and why" (1990, p. 4). While acknowledging the importance of pleasure in the quality of life, he was concerned with exploring beyond the immediate experiences of pleasure (sleep, food, rest and sexual intimacy), to get to a deeper understanding of what enables people to develop psychologically.

When people ponder further about what makes their lives rewarding, they tend to move beyond pleasant memories and begin to remember other events, other experiences that overlap with pleasurable ones but fall into a category that deserves a separate name: *enjoyment* (1990, p. 46).

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the essence of enjoyment has several major components. These include having a sense of control and being able to concentrate on the task and become totally involved in it. People thus lose awareness of everyday worries and frustrations as well as losing the sense of self-consciousness and of the passage of time. In Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' model which he uses to explain enjoyment (1990) there is no room for self scrutiny/criticism, in other words for the person to check out how they are going or how well they are doing. It would appear that such mechanisms and outside monitoring 'devices' cease to operate.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that this loss of self-consciousness is a significant component of enjoyment. This experience of losing a sense of self-consciousness could also entail becoming very aware of oneself, to the exclusion of all other disturbances. On reflection, the person may learn more about herself by being fully immersed and totally conscious during the experience.

This component of enjoyment, the loss of self-consciousness, could be difficult for women to achieve because of what Berger calls the 'male gaze' (1975). At the same time, this state of enjoyment could provide a release from the male gaze and provide time-out from the outside world, time when women could feel free to be themselves. Perhaps this is what the women's studies student was striving for when she stated in her health contract diary:

My new goal to change behaviour is to retain a female sense of self. To keep my own sense of self. My strategy to achieve this goal is to undermine the clarity and the singular roles that are formed for females in a patriarchal culture (Sue, 1992) [italics added].

And Radway (1984) says:

Women are able to lose themselves in a book, it supplies them with an important emotional release that is proscribed in daily life because the social role with which they identify themselves leaves little room for guiltless, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure (p. 95-96).

The enjoyment state could therefore be a state in which a person is unaware of how others and the world are perceiving them; an opportunity to learn about themselves; an experience where they have a sense of control and are engrossed in the flow of the activity/thoughts. There follows a further elaboration of Csikszentmihalyi's flow model which he uses to explain enjoyment.

The notion of flow

Flow has its roots in the humanistic approach to psychology, which emerged in the United States during the 1950s and 60s. Psychologists such as Maslow (1968), Horney (1966), Perls (1973), and Rogers (1961) were interested in what constituted healthy behaviour, as opposed to the previous focus on abnormality, deviation and illness. They were concerned with understanding and developing a new philosophy of life that encompassed the being-becoming, self-actualisation and peak experiences of Maslow (1962); the becoming a person of Rogers (1961); and other theories of personal growth. Some of the humanistic theories, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, have themselves been related to leisure by some researchers (Betschild 1972; Farina 1980).

Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) research into some of the positive aspects of human experience – joy, creativity and the process of total involvement with life which he called 'flow' – then built on the work of those theorists to explain the meaning of enjoyable experiences. He was interested in learning more about activities which are enjoyable in themselves and the form of motivation that was present during these activities. Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) goal for an early study was to "understand enjoyment, here and now... as an ongoing process which provides rewarding experiences in the present" (p. 9). By studying groups of people engaged in so-called autotelic (intrinsically motivated) activities, including men and women – rock-climbers, chess players, modern dancers, a description of what enjoyment consists of emerged. The participants in these activities all gained a unique experience, one that: was intrinsically rewarding; was of complete involvement; presents constant challenges; makes full use of the skills required; and offers no time to get bored or to worry about what may or may not happen. He called these macro or deep flow activities, in that participants in these activities became completely involved to the exclusion of any outside disturbances. This was the "peculiar dynamic state – the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" (p. 36) that Csikszentmihalyi called flow.

The model of flow

The flow model is a way of viewing the process of total involvement with life where there is an integration of the whole being. In flow, people become involved in some experience or activity to such an extent that they are unaware of time and outside disturbances; they are completely immersed in

the here and now. Whitehead (1990) suggests that, while being involved in some form of movement people who are fluent in the movement can find themselves caught up in the total involvement of the situation.

"Perhaps the clearest sign of flow is the merging of action and awareness" (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, p. 38), where a person is aware of the actions but not of the awareness itself.

When the flow model is applied to a person's experience of an activity the *quality* of the experience might be a more valid guide than the *characteristics* of the activity. For example in the activity of driving, depending on the purpose, perhaps driving to a difficult job (a stressful, anxious experience) or perhaps driving to the beach for a swim (relaxing and enjoyable), the *quality* of the activity (driving) may be a better measure of whether driving *per se* is enjoyable.

An important aspect of optimal experience or flow is that the challenge of the activity matches the skill of the participant; it involves:

a sense that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing (Csikszentmihaly 1990, p. 71).

Where the challenge is too great a sense of anxiety and frustration occurs but when the challenge is insufficient boredom results.

Studies on flow

In his early research Csikszentmihalyi (1975) also investigated flow patterns in everyday life. He was interested in whether the small routine behaviour patterns, for example daydreaming, smoking or doodling (microflow activities), could be included in his flow model. Because he found they had the potential to be as intrinsically rewarding as deep-flow activities, he suggested that "flow exists on a continuum from extremely low to extremely high complexity" (p. 141). In one of the few studies that researched age and gender differences in flow, Csikszentmihalyi was interested to find out if men and women differ in the microflow activities performed during the day to structure their everyday experiences (p. 142). His sample consisted of 20 university students (11 men and 9 women). When analysing the sex differences that emerged he commented that they were "few and rather stereotypic" (p. 151). His conclusion was that because they were from a "sophisticated urban university" these students were "as free of sex-role limitations as one can be in our society" (p. 151).

A further study investigated the profession of surgery where it was found that surgeons enjoy their work. They described their experiences in terms almost identical with those used by rock climbers and chess players. This latter example suggests that the flow model can be applied to activities that are not necessarily associated with leisure. Also, if a person receives greater satisfaction and intrinsic rewards from waged work, the distinctions between work and leisure make little sense.

Rathunde (1988) conducted a study of flow with teenagers in the United States. He identified five characteristics in the family context that promoted optimal experience/flow. These were firstly *clarity*: the teenagers know what their parents expect from them; no ambiguous messages are given. Secondly, *centring*: do the children perceive their parents to be involved in their everyday feelings and experiences or are the parents always thinking about their future and about them getting a job? Thirdly, *choice*: having a variety of choices while knowing the consequences if they are 'breaking parental rules'. Fourthly, *commitment and trust*: knowing their parents will support them in their chosen interests. And lastly, *challenge*: having a wide range of 'increasingly complex opportunities' available to them. The extent to which these characteristics feature in a person's teenage years would appear to be important in determining their ability to experience flow as an adult.

Flow and gender

In the introduction to a section on 'Varieties of the flow experience' which includes research by a number of academics on Japanese motorcycle gangs, elderly Korean immigrants, flow and writing and flow in solitary ordeals Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1988) suggest that there is a common theme and state:

Regardless of gender, age, ethnic or cultural origin, enjoyment is the same everywhere, and it is made possible by the same configuration of subjective and objective conditions (p. 85).

Csikszentmihalyi used a wide range of participants in his studies.

Unfortunately, however, he appears to have assumed that women and men have similar opportunities to express and enjoy themselves and to indulge in creativity. In this a 'masculinist world view' is evident (Stanley & Wise 1993). In fact women are still oppressed and their experiences and opportunities are not necessarily the same as those in the dominant group.

In one of the few studies of flow that have been done exclusively on women by women, two social psychologists, Allison and Duncan (1988), investigated flow and anti-flow in professional and blue-collar women. Anti-flow was the term used to describe the women's experiences in which they had the greatest sense of boredom and or frustration. Their results showed that both groups of women had "intense flow experiences when interacting with other people, especially with their own children" (p. 136). Differences between the groups related to the setting of their flow experience: the professional women claimed "to experience their greatest sense of flow at work [paid]; whereas blue-collar women experienced flow predominantly at home and in leisure" (p. 132). The experiences that produced a sense of anti-flow were ones where the tasks were "tedious, simplistic and repetitive" (p. 135). Not surprisingly, blue-collar women who did assembly line work found that boredom was their greatest enemy. Many of these workers became frustrated with their supervisors who were often incompetent and overbearing, with the result that they experienced a lack of control and little challenge, the antithesis of flow.

Allison and Duncan concluded that the information they received from the women indicated the "complexity of human experience and the challenge they pose for understanding enjoyment" (p. 137). As their research on flow was based on the traditional understandings of work and leisure, their study was not able to illuminate the range of ways that women experience enjoyment but they showed women experiencing flow in work and non-work situations.

Unfortunately much flow research to date has added little to our understanding of this experience for women. Most studies of 'flow' (like early studies on leisure) have been androcentric, with male researchers concentrating mainly upon male experience. However the flow concept would appear to provide a different way to understand enjoyment. "Flow can happen anywhere, at any time, provided that the person's capacities and the opportunities for action in the environment are well matched" (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi 1989, p. 85).

This study is concerned with how midlife women view their lives and how they enjoy themselves. The following section provides an overview of research on midlife women including the problems with the stereotypical view of midlife women as being constrained by menopause and 'over the hill'. Other views are presented that give a different perspective on middle

age women, showing them taking control and making changes with over half a lifetime ahead of them.

MIDLIFE WOMEN

The 1970s were a time when many changes in social patterns and policy issues were taking place, especially for women, with second-wave feminists demanding change in all spheres of life. Women were entering, or re-entering the labour market during their middle years (Beechey 1986), returning to study (Alington & Troll 1984) and "there was a new mix of education, work and leisure throughout the life span" (Brim 1982, p. vii). Research on the lived experience of women, including midlife women, was beginning to emerge. During this time 'Midlife crisis' (Bates & Hathorn 1987) 'suburban neurosis' (Macdonald 1972) and the phenomenon of the 'empty nest' syndrome (Fiske 1980) were being named as problems related to stress and rapid change. The success of Sheehy's first book *Passages* (1976), indicated increased interest in these questions of how adults live their lives. Giele (1982) provided some of the first feminist analyses of midlife women, being concerned with the way women were frequently "under-represented in studies of work and adulthood ... and [asking] why work was given so much more emphasis than leisure or family life." (Brim 1982, p. viii)

Midlife has been understood or viewed in a number of ways: as an age, a stage of life, in terms of cultural differences and from the standpoint of those in midlife, as well as others observing. The first two phases have been the predominant approaches supported by research methodologies that rely upon positivist methods. These approaches have placed midlife in a sequential order – after a certain age/stage there is midlife – an approach that affords little recognition of the individual's own perception of their life and does not take into account the "cultural specificity of experience, and thus with the medium through which all experience is channelled – the body/mind/emotions" (Stanley & Wise 1993, p. 193).

During the last decade, due largely to demographic shifts in the population structures of Western societies with increasing numbers of people living longer and the ageing of the first generation of post-1960s women's movement activists, there has been a noticeable increase in interest amongst feminists in the health and wellbeing of midlife women. "This new area of research" (Unger & Crawford 1992, p. 280), recognised in the 1980s by Doress and Laskin of The Boston Women's Health Collective in their book entitled

Ourselves, Growing Older: Women Ageing with Knowledge and Power (1989), has now taken its place as a key issue in feminist journals. For example, it was the theme of Volume 14 of *The Psychology of Women Quarterly* (1990). The editors for that issue, Fodor and Franks, were both in midlife and wanted to bring "a new perspective to theory, research, and practice with older women" (p. 447). They were concerned as to whether the dominant themes in the literature to date on midlife, in which it was presented as something to be feared, in the sense of loss of youth and opportunity and of being overwhelmed by the ageing process, gave a true and realistic view of midlife for women. Perhaps, they argued, it is more:

a new prime of life, a time for renewal, getting rid of youthful preoccupations with appearance and body, a time to seek out new challenges, valuing wisdom, maturity, and new possibilities for growth and change? (p. 447)

The papers mostly focused on mainstream, white, American women. These women, now at midlife, are part of the cohort who experienced the effect of the second-wave women's movement on the way they viewed their roles and their lives as a whole. As young adults they were "in the vanguard of the changes in the culture; they joined consciousness-raising groups, altered gender role assignments, and sought out further education and careers" (Fodor & Franks 1990, p. 446). The changes that occurred have had far-reaching effects, and the papers presented would appear to suggest that midlife may indeed be the new prime of life.

Views of ageing

In Western society age has a significant effect upon an individual's role and social status. There is also a long legacy of ageism with negative stereotypes about growing old. As Copper (1986) comments:

the midlife woman, in her rage and fear, may unconsciously discharge all kinds of covert aggression against the old woman as the personification of what is threatening her (p. 48).

As they grow old women's lives and experiences are invariably misrepresented and undervalued and there are conflicting views about their position in society (Scutt 1993; Bernard & Meade 1993). Because women's roles and status have traditionally been based on their reproductive functions a double standard of ageing still operates. Women are regarded as being in decline by the time they reach menopause after their child-bearing years having finished, whereas middle-aged men are considered to be in their prime of life (Sontag 1974).

The media and society in general maintain a view of older women as being incompetent: their ideas are not worth listening to and they are not an

authority on any subject (especially economics, politics and/or cultural issues). Growing old means facing up to ageism and for women this is "firmly embedded in sexism – an extension of the male power to define, control values, erase, disempower, and divide" (Copper 1986, p. 47). Social attitudes portrayed in the media and elsewhere thus challenge the midlife woman's ability to maintain a self-image that is positive. While they still feel like the same person and as evidenced by the common adages 'You are only as old as you feel', and 'I don't feel any older' these women are confronted with the changed perceptions of other people (Coney 1991). Because these women are judged by their age, they feel pressured to conform to a social stereotype that dictates how they behave, look and dress.

'You don't look your age', 'She's 55 but doesn't look a day over 40', are also common phrases which many people, but particularly women, have to come to terms with when they reach midlife. Women grow up with the constant concern of being looked at and judged by their appearance. "Women watch themselves being looked at, the surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female" (Berger 1975, p. 47). Thus for women, who according to Berger's male gaze are forever pursuing youth/beauty, to be seen as being younger than their chronological age is considered an asset. These phrases are a form of 'age passing', passing for 'young enough', which is part of most women's experience (Copper 1986).

The ideological construction of the middle-aged woman as being finished at 40 (Gergen 1990), infertile and menopausal, is a very Western view of women and ageing. Youth culture is viewed as the ideal and those who do not conform to a youthful image are discounted. Not all societies disregard and negate the dignity and wisdom of older women. In traditional Aboriginal culture, for example, the notion of the wise old woman is accepted and to be called an old woman is a mark of respect (Bell 1983). In that culture it is the middle-aged women who are accepted by the men as being able to act with authority (Scutt 1993). In traditional Maori culture, older women come to be "respected as Kuia as they demonstrate their willingness to be involved and take responsibility in community and tribal affairs" (Potter 1991, p. 10).

The medicalisation of menopause

Menopause has an aura of mystique about it because it is an experience that the individual woman faces by herself. In many cultures birth, death and a

girl's arrival at puberty are acknowledged in various ways by others and, for the majority of women, marriage and childbearing involve rituals to celebrate the traditional functions of being a woman. But as Ballinger and Walker (1987), surveying many cultures, comment:

Very few cultural rites celebrating menopause are known to anthropologists. This is remarkable since it is the only major physiological and social change that is rarely marked by 'rites of passage' (p. 1.).

Why is menopause ignored in this way? Is it because it can be seen as a sign of the end of a woman's reproductive role and therefore the end of what has been viewed as the most important of female functions, that of bearing and nurturing children. Another explanation is that, as many feminists reaching this stage have found, it is hard to know when it has begun because of the uncertainty of the final monthly period, so an occasion rarely presents itself as the time to rejoice (Greer 1991).

The specific health concerns of midlife women were also largely ignored during the 1970s and early 80s. Despite all middle-aged women experiencing menopause in some form or another, it was rarely addressed by the women's health movement. In Australia and New Zealand, for example, it fell to a few women (usually post-menopausal themselves), to run support groups for menopausal women in women's health centres. The neglect of this area was linked to the general disregard of ageing as a subject worthy of analysis (Bernard & Meade 1993). It was also related to the way the medical profession traditionally viewed midlife and, by association, menopausal, women.

As Greer (1991) one of the doyennes of second-wave feminism, states, when discussing the issue of men defining women's experience:

male researchers remain attached to a view of menopause as catastrophe despite the necessary conclusions from their own research [that] indicates an emotional loading that they themselves are unable to let go (p. 19).

Having felt at a loss and rather powerless to 'treat' midlife women with their pre/peri/post menopausal 'symptoms', the medical profession prescribed tranquillisers and suggested that the women were neurotic; it was deemed to be "all in their heads" (Coney 1991).

While menopause is, in fact, a normal physiological process, it is regarded by many health practitioners as an illness. Indeed, a 1981 World Health Organisation report entitled 'Research on the menopause' defines menopause as an 'oestrogen-deficiency disease'. As Broom comments, "writing about menopause is writing about degeneration and malfunction"

(1991, p. 55). The emphasis in many texts is on the negative aspects of ovaries 'failing' to produce sufficient hormones. Writing from a feminist viewpoint Martin (1987) metaphorically describes this as "the breakdown of a system of authority" (p. 42). Descriptions in medical texts of the physiological changes during menopause use words such as 'fail', 'falter' and 'decline'; ovaries are said to cease to respond and fail to produce. Menopause is thus presented "as a process of breakdown, failure and decline" (p. 43).

Greer (1991), satirises the medical approach

Let the Masters in Menopause congregate in luxury hotels all over the world to deliver and to harken to papers on the latest astonishing discoveries about the decline of grip strength in menopause or the number of stromal cells in the fifty-year-old ovary; the woman herself is too busy to listen. She is climbing her own mountain in search of her own [well] won horizon, after years of being absorbed in the struggle of others...The truth is that fewer women come to grief at this obstacle than at any other in their tempestuous lives, though it is one of the stiffest challenges they ever face. Their behaviours may baffle those who have unthinkingly exploited them all their lives before, but it is important not to explain, not to apologise. The climacteric marks the end of apologising. The chrysalis of conditioning has once for all to break and the female woman finally to emerge (p. 439-440).

Women who seek advice and help from the medical profession are often provided with explanations that are based on these images of apparent disintegration and include these graphic terms; some develop a very negative view of their bodies and a fearful attitude toward menopause.

Coney (1991) argues that midlife women are a 'sought-after commodity' because the midlife woman "now has her very own disease – oestrogen deficiency syndrome – specific to her sex and time of life" (p. 16). The emergence of a cure in the form of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has enabled the medical profession to regain a sense of power and control over midlife women; they prescribe HRT and other drugs as the 'answer' (Coney 1991). HRT is seen as the 'wonder drug', providing the solution to menopausal 'symptoms'. This is in spite of the fact that evidence about its effectiveness and suitability for menopausal women is conflicting and confusing (Bernard & Meade 1993).

While women are supposedly given a choice as to whether they wish to take HRT or not, feminist researchers are critical of this claim; they suggest that it is deceptive because the information about HRT is confusing, and because of the way the market has constructed women's needs to ensure that menopause 'symptoms' appear to need medical intervention (Coney 1991; Broom 1991).

A social model of health and wellbeing that takes into account all aspects of midlife women's lives presents a very different view to that prescribed by the bio-medical model, where health in midlife is contained by the menopause. Studies by feminists, including Coney (1991), Barnett and Baruch (1984) in the United States and the Society for Research on Women (SROW) (1988) in New Zealand, have shown that midlife women are not overly anxious about menopause.

Based on written submissions and interviews with midlife women, Coney (1991) reported that "virtually none of the women [she spoke to] was especially concerned about menopause" (p. 41). Although some aspects of getting old – wrinkles and middle-aged spread; the effect of negative social attitudes; sexuality issues; the social unacceptability of older lesbians; and 'running out of time' – were of varying degrees of concern to these women, the empty nest syndrome was seen to be of no importance and coming to the end of their reproductive years was regarded by many as a positive event.

Similarly to Coney, in a study entitled 'Mastery and pleasure: A two factor model of wellbeing of women in the middle years' Barnett and Baruch (1984) found that the women's menstrual status (whether pre-menopausal, menopausal or post-menopausal) was irrelevant to their level of wellbeing and that the empty nest was of no importance. In this sample of white women living near Boston it was found that their greatest pleasure was derived from the combination of being married, with husband present, and high status employment.

The SROW (1988) study entitled 'The time of our lives' surveyed 500 midlife women between the ages of 35 and 60 years, living in a city in New Zealand. The women who volunteered to take part in this study tended to be better educated and in higher socio-economic groups than midlife women in general. The researchers were concerned with a range of health and lifestyle issues pertaining to midlife women, including physiological aspects of health, the menopause and associated changes of ageing.

The findings were divided into two broad categories: the general happiness of the women in midlife, and more specific health issues such as pre-menstrual tension; post-natal depression; gynaecological surgery and the menopause. The researchers comment that the results do not support the stereotype of midlife women feeling depressed and aimless as a result of

children leaving home and the loss of the motherhood role. While this study does not actually show women having the time of their lives, as the title suggests, it is a significant piece of research, that has been done by women about New Zealand women, and specifically addresses the issues of midlife women's health and wellbeing.

Other views on midlife

"Women's lives are constructed of changes so vivid that they might well be called metamorphoses" (Greer 1991, p. 55). As the following discussion shows, midlife women would appear to be resisting the traditional view of ageing as being a time of endings, stagnation and loss of important roles and connections. Texts instead are indicating that they are not necessarily constrained by their health, or by decreased energy or physical ability; rather they are finding that their lives can be enjoyable, healthy and positive. Margaret Mead, as her daughter Catherine Bateson (1989) explains, believed that all women whether they have had busy multiple careers or are reviving old interests after decades as homemakers, have a hidden resource of energy and vitality for their later years that she called 'post-menopausal zest'.

Amongst the research on midlife women over the last decade there have been an increasing number of studies and publications on lesbians and middle age (Sang *et al.* 1991; Macdonald & Rich 1987; Johnson 1991). Some women discover lesbianism in midlife and many have chosen to make significant changes in their lives to adjust to their new found sexuality (Kirkpatrick 1989; Charbonneau & Lander 1991). This cohort of women, who had spent half their lives considering themselves to be heterosexual, who had been married and often had children, finally, because of a series of events or experiences began to question their sexuality. The women's movement also provided the opportunity for women to question their lives from a different perspective. Charbonneau & Lander (1991) found in their study that although each woman had her own story, a common theme that emerged was the distorted view of lesbians that many had previously held; "most of the women [had] assumed that lesbians were so foreign that there could be no possible connection" (p. 40). Becoming a lesbian often provided a network of women friends that were previously not available. This could also provide the opportunity for enjoyable social occasions with older women who were not restricted by gender stereotypes.

Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) believes as one gets older and "death sharpens life", women should "be reborn". They should question everything they do such

as social arrangements or family duties, and insist on an intensity in their lives, and not do things just because they have always done them. For Greer (1991), life clearly has been sharpened. She asserts that:

I am aware of my mortality as I never was before I was fifty. I do not squander my time now; I would never dream of bartering an hour of a spring morning to lie in bed. If I am sleepless I go out into the darkness to join the short-lived jubilee of the other creatures ... The best time in life is always now, because it is the only time there is. You can't live regretting what's past, and you can't live anticipating the future. If you spend any amount of time doing either of those things you never live at all (p. 434–5).

Steinheim, a feminist activist for over 30 years, in *Revolution From Within: A Book of Self-esteem* writes about her long quest for self-esteem. She emphasises the importance of 'finding ourselves', and in the process of writing and finding herself, as a woman in midlife, she says:

Think of the joy of self-discovery: solving a problem, making a bookcase, inventing a dance step, losing oneself in a sport, cooking for friends, writing a poem – all by reaching within for a vision and then making it real (p. 267).

Greer (1991) talks about midlife women finding their own means of fulfilment. She discusses the significance of friendship for some older women and how the experience of solitude brings liberty for others. She also cites the stories of women who have chosen isolation and adventure, for example:

Helen Thayer at 52 skied to the North Pole with her dog. She pulled a 160 pound sled for 27 days and 345 miles. Thayer courted annihilation, and several times must have thought she had found it; she emerged reborn (Greer 1991, p. 56).

Friedan (1993), who is now in her late sixties, has never felt so free. In her book *The Fountain of Age* she discusses issues of ageing. While her research is more concerned with women over sixty-five, her findings are likely to have some relevance for midlife women too. She presents a positive view of ageing, challenging the "age mystique" and stressing the endless opportunities and adventures for older people, "as long as the energy flows" (p. 614).

Another positive example of midlife women and their 'emerging selves' comes from Rogers (1980); who wrote about her experiences between the ages of 40 and 50. During this time she moved from being a woman "struggling and fighting for "The Right To Be Me" " (p. 9), through a journey of discovery of her self as a woman, an 'opening process' that allowed her "to find new pathways of energy" (p. 166). That process has

enabled her to tune in to her intuition and provided her with a new lens through which to view the world.

Other texts celebrate women 'coming into our fullness' (Rountree 1991) and include interviews and accounts about women who have chosen to break out of traditional middle-age patterns. Two recently published books on midlife women's experiences in New Zealand (Gray 1991), and the United States (Vickers & Thomas 1993) feature women who have taken on new challenges and made creative choices in midlife. Gray provides stories about women who have made major changes in their lives. The reasons for these changes included: being dissatisfied with their previous situation; having a burning ambition they wanted to fulfil; and being forced into new ventures by circumstances beyond their control, for example illness, breakdown of marriage or financial pressures. These women were in the process of resisting "growing old gracefully" and were becoming artists, writers, runners, divers, businesswomen.

Vickers and Thomas (1993) also collected stories of women between the age of 40 and 50 years. They found that these women, while not necessarily having a midlife crisis, were in the process of having "a midlife reckoning experience" (p. 2) that may have taken several years. Vickers and Thomas likened it to "waking up at midlife" (p. 2). The real crisis for these women appeared to be a "crisis of identity and meaning" (p. 3), which was sometimes painful, but in most cases resulted in the women "feeling more alive as we considered the changes we were in the process of making" (p. 2). Creativity in various forms appeared to be the way these women overcame these crises. Women undertook artistic endeavours such as pottery and painting; became involved in new work and/or new affiliations which provided them with a sense of personal power and fulfilment; or developed their inner life with time for reflection and letting go. Whichever choices they made they became more "comfortable with who they are" (p. 4).

In Australia, Macdonald (1992) has written an account of her involvement with a group of older women who regularly attended a self-help hydrotherapy and massage group in a suburb of Melbourne. It was a journey of women who were empowering themselves in the company of strangers and using the pool as the catalyst. Scutt (1993) too has collected a series of the stories of women in their fifties and sixties who have talked about their experiences. These women gave accounts of their lives which provided a

view of strong, wilful, creative women who were "growing older gloriously" (Scutt 1993).

Kent (1994) found, in her study of women's experiences of menopause, that midlife women value their ability to meet new challenges successfully; they become empowered by their growing awareness that they have the skills and confidence to try new experiences and activities and take more control in their lives. Like Vickers and Thomas, Kent ascertained that creativity featured for women as a way of becoming their own person. She also noted the importance women placed on having "the time, space and privacy to engage in things as they wanted" (p. 105).

The women portrayed in these texts, as well as the second-wave feminists (for example Greer, Steinhem, Friedan) as they became middle aged have begun then to challenge the stereotypical views of women in midlife being 'over the hill' and 'non-productive'. Rogers (1980) has reframed the cliché:

We are "over the hill". That is we have worked hard as mother, as volunteer, as the power-behind-the-throne, and as professionals. We are tired of inequality. We have climbed that "hill". And now we are at the top looking over to our futures...Life is exciting if we understand ourselves and our society, drop our fears and walk on...(p. 196).

These women have used their own experiences as a baseline and begun to question the ageist and sexist attitudes and assumptions about midlife and older women. By retelling women's stories they provide evidence of women who are resisting the repressive and ageist discourses prescribed by society and who are choosing to enjoy their lives (Wearing 1992b, 1994). These women (among others) are asking, 'what is a meaningful life for midlife women?' and how can we become the 'women we want to be?'

Midlife for women is apparently not necessarily restricted by menopause. For many it is a time to make new starts and positive changes: to get a different perspective on their lives; to re-evaluate priorities; to take the initiative to change old habits and patterns. By examining the various aspects of midlife women's lives (such as health, the body, enjoyment, leisure, relationality) in a more holistic way, rather than viewing or researching them in isolation, a model may be developed that takes account of their lives as a whole. Such a model would incorporate aspects of leisure, health and wellbeing into a framework which relates to the women's own lived experience.

CONCEPTUALISING WOMEN'S LIVES HOLISTICALLY

Because the traditional approaches to leisure did not appear to be appropriate for understanding leisure, feminist leisure researchers, (Deem 1988; Wimbush & Talbot 1988; Green *et al.* 1990; Scraton 1994; Henderson *et al.* 1996) and feminists in the women's health movement (Lupton 1994; Martin 1987; Ripper 1994; Broom 1991) stress the importance of looking at women's lives as a whole "with leisure implicitly a part of women's social, economic, physical and cultural worlds" (Scraton 1994, p. 258). As well as these holistic dimensions it is also necessary to take into account other components of women's lives. These include health which encompasses physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing as well as sexuality (Williams (Betschild) 1979; Bernard & Meade 1993). It is also important to acknowledge the central role that women's friendships and relationships play in their lives (Bella 1989; Woodward & Green 1990; Henderson *et al.* 1996). By using a holistic approach, leisure can be seen to be an integral part of all of women's life experience and not a separate entity, as portrayed in the traditional dichotomy of work/leisure.

Three interconnected aspects of an holistic approach are presented in the following section. The first is the notion of 'relationality': one of the characteristics of women's lives, it involves an understanding of relationships and the way these are built and expanded through women's everyday activities and experiences. The second is the concept of a 'flow lifestyle' in which people's lives are lived as a whole, seamlessly. Lastly the notion that women engage in the act of 'composing their lives' is presented.

Relationality

Relationality refers to the "consciousness of the necessary interdependence of human beings, to a sense of connectedness to others...for the maximisation of well-being for all persons ... " (Wine 1982, p. 68).

Wine, a psychologist, developed this term to contrast with the individuality principle that underlay malestream psychology's models of man. She was critical of feminist psychologists' early work that was mainly concerned with countering the androcentric research that positioned women as inferior because they differed from the male standard. The development of a woman-centred perspective of female experience by feminist psychologists has begun to address women's interpersonal orientation in terms of their

qualities of nurturing and sensitivity, and has challenged the devaluing of these qualities in malestream psychology.

Feminist psychologists, including Miller (1990) and Chodorow (1978), have provided alternative models for understanding the development of gender differences which challenge androcentric notions of a *separated* sense of self. They present a more gynocentric model based on a *connected* self, which reflects the interdependence of human beings in relationship and acknowledges the responsibilities of caring (Wine 1982). Women do not, it appears, exist on their own as separate definable entities, but primarily in relation to others (Miller 1990).

Women's friendships and relationships appear to have different qualities from those of men. They are more empathetic and altruistic (Mackie 1983). The principle of relationality provides a better understanding of the lived experience of people's lives where:

the meaning of the activity is in one's relationship to those with whom one is doing the activity ... not in the activity itself—whether it is washing dishes, playing squash, or reading aloud—but in the context of relationship and responsibility (Bella 1989, p. 168).

This approach challenges some of the traditional understanding of the meanings of leisure, especially freedom from obligation, such freedom has little value or relevance to women who understand that relationships entail responsibility.

Women's roles, for example, daughters, wives, mothers, aunts or grandmothers, also involve relationality and responsibility. The stereotypical role of women as carers and supporters and partners of others situates them in "caught caretaker" roles (Truchses 1985) rather than identifying themselves as people in their own right (Miller 1990). These roles that women find themselves caught in may inhibit women's ability to acknowledge their value and right to make choices about their own lives as independent people. However research has shown that women get enjoyment from the fun of others, their children and/or spouses, for example, Gilligan (1987). The question remains do they choose to be involved in enjoyable activities for themselves?

In a Canadian study of women's leisure in a small country community, Hunter and Whitson (1991) observed that the women did not relate to the traditional concepts of leisure but, when asked to talk about experiences that gave them 'happiness, fulfilment or pleasure (i.e. without using the word

'leisure')' (p. 223), they spoke freely about their lives and the relationships and activities that brought them pleasure. Many of the women said that what made leisure meaningful for them "was precisely the shared good times that made friendship and family real and happy experiences rather than empty words" (p. 231).

Hunter and Whitson also noted that these women:

often spoke thoughtfully and freely about concepts like wellbeing, and about achieving a different balance in their lives between facilitating the happiness of others and doing things for themselves (p. 219).

They were also seen to be actively negotiating their own power and managing the inherent constraints and oppression associated with familism and patriarchy. This study would appear to support Bella's argument that "the organising principle of women's lives...is "relationality"" (Bella 1989, p. 173).

A flow lifestyle

As well as identifying flow experiences Cskszentmihalyi also explored the possibility of a flow lifestyle. He acknowledged that flow as a way of life has the potential for being a continuing flow experience although he considers that flow experiences for most people and most cultures are few and far between in everyday life. "Everyday experience is characterised more by listless, low-level involvement interrupted by constant distractions, by boredom, and by periods of worry" (Csikszentmihalyi 1988, p. 183).

The social and cultural systems that exist in the 1990s in Western societies, where satisfaction and fulfilment rely inevitably on extrinsic rewards, are not apparently conducive to living a flow lifestyle. In the few studies related to a flow lifestyle it is therefore not surprising to find that indigenous, traditional and migrant groups are featured.

In a primitive culture that is well adapted to its environment it could be possible for the people to be in flow most of the time. An illustration of this is provided by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), and concerned Canadian Indians in the Shushwap region. They evolved a system to enable their culture to balance challenge and skills and moved their entire village every 25 to 30 years because the elders felt that: "at times the world became too predictable and the challenge began to go out of life. Without challenge, life had no meaning" (p. 184).

Fave and Massimini (1988) have studied traditional cultures, such as that of a Northern Italian Alps community, where lifestyle is perceived as a whole

rather than being divided into segments of work, leisure and maintenance. They demonstrated the "deep integration between [the experience of] flow and everyday productive activities achieved in traditional cultures" (p. 196). When Serafina Vinon (76 years old), one of the members of the Alps community, was asked what she enjoyed doing most in life, she had no trouble answering:

milking the cows, taking them to the pasture, pruning the orchard, carding wool' ... in effect, what she enjoys most is what she has been doing for a living all along. In her own words 'It gives me a great satisfaction. To be outdoors, to talk with people, to be with my animals ... Everything in nature keeps you company; you see nature progress everyday. You feel clean and happy: too bad that you get tired and have to go home ... even when you have to work a lot it is very beautiful (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, p. 146).

When studying the life and leisure experiences and satisfactions of older women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Italian and Greek – 9; Asian [Vietnamese, Filipino and Chinese] – 9 and native born Anglo Australians – 6) resident in Australia. Hibbins and Watkins (1993) found that leisure was incorporated into their lives; the women "did not compartmentalise their lives and tended to see all aspects of life intermixing in a flow of existence" (p. 9).

In western cultures it is perhaps the subcultures that provide the best opportunities for a flow lifestyle. These include the Amish and Mennonite farmers in North America and perhaps the surfies in Australia. The world-wide cruising fraternity of yachting are another example of people in the flow. In a study of ocean cruising, Macbeth (1988) researched people who chose to sail around the world for months or years at a time. They explained that they wanted the opportunity to get away from their humdrum existence, the alienating nature of life in cities and towns, the constant deadlines, and to do something adventurous. The lifestyle of cruising fits the flow criteria because it involves challenge, constant problem solving, total involvement and the rewards are in the lifestyle itself. Studies of flow have shown that a person is not necessarily constantly in a state of flow throughout the whole experience, there are fluctuations of flow and nonflow, a lifestyle that incorporates the flow criteria is possible (Macbeth 1988). Life on board a yacht:

is dominated by the ultimate logic of nature, wherein each element of existence flows and merges with each other element. There is a holistic and total involvement with the process of living and being (Macbeth 1988, p. 220).

The examples above provide support for the possibility of living life in an integrated way where there is a sense of seamlessness; of having a flow lifestyle. Although a flow lifestyle is not common, there may be many individuals who aspire to this goal. A further insight into the way women can view and gain control over their lives is presented below.

Composing a life

In her book *Composing a Life*, Mary Catherine Bateson writes about an act of creation that engages all women, at various times, but perhaps particularly in midlife: the composition of their lives. In midlife it is a process of assessment and redirection that they can undertake with half a lifetime of productivity ahead of them.

Composing a life entails women making decisions about how they want to lead enjoyable lives. Bateson (1989) wrote about four midlife women and one woman in her eighties who she described as artists. The women she studied included herself, a black college president, a psychiatrist from a Jewish family, a scientist and technical engineer and the eighty-year-old who regards herself as a dancer. All five women had experienced supportive childhoods, but as Bateson commented "all of us had experiences that undermined confidence and aspiration" (p. 39). They married early, and although four of them had children they all expected to continue with their other work and involvements. All, however had "rather limited understandings of the puzzle this posed ... [and] all put the puzzle together differently" (p. 51). They had lived and were continuing to live many lives both personally and professionally, while facing change, discontinuity and division of their energy.

By examining their achievements and how they fitted together, these women had composed or begun to compose their lives. Rather than fitting any "model of single-track ambition" (p. 15) that involves a fixed goal, they appeared to regard their lives as being in a state of flux and were making improvisations and changes appropriate for them in the 1990s. These five women were putting together the various components of their lives, in order to create, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, a complete picture of their life world. This composing process involves a number of challenges: seeing the many possible alternatives; choosing what is best for the individual; assembling something new; and creating an innovative and integrated whole. Composing a life involves "an openness to possibilities and the

capacity to put them together in a way that is structurally sound" (Bateson 1989, p. 63).

This way of regarding women's lives and experiences as an integrated whole, rather than in a fragmented fashion, appears to be a way of placing leisure, health, wellbeing and enjoyment in context. As her daughter, Bateson developed Margaret Mead's idea of post-menopausal zest. The combination of energy and experience creates the potential for midlife women to develop new and different ways of living their lives.

ACCESSING WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCE

Leisure research to date has demonstrated that leisure for women is a complex, multi-faceted/layered (Green *et al.* 1990; Henderson 1991) concept and requires an understanding of the whole of their lives not just in terms of time available or activities, but incorporating all aspects of their lived experience. To research aspects of women's lives (such as body, health, time or leisure) in isolation not only reinforces these societal notions of a fragmentation of women's lives, but also ignores the way in which women construct their sense of self. Betschild and Simmons (1996) have argued that health and leisure should no longer be regarded as discrete parts of women's lives or be used by our culture to fragment women's lives further; each needs to be viewed in the context of women's lived experience.

There is a need to develop a new research agenda which is based on the everyday lives of midlife women and incorporates the ways these women have discovered for living their lives and enjoying themselves. The research needs to take account of the individual differences within this cohort of women as well as identify any common experiences. An approach that takes into account women's lives as a whole and not as fragmented parts (Scraton 1994; Betschild 1995; Betschild & Simmons 1996) is required to gain access to their lived experience whereby leisure can be seen as part of their lifestyle and the research questions for this thesis can be addressed.

The research questions for this research include:

- How do midlife women enjoy themselves and what are the meanings of these experiences?
- Is Csikszentmihalyi's, theoretical model of enjoyment, the concept of 'flow', relevant to this group of women?

- Do midlife women relate to the concept of leisure as it is constructed in Australian culture? Are their experiences related to popular notions of leisure?
- What impact does menopause have on midlife women's health? How does menopause affect their lives?

SUMMARY

There is a growing body of evidence, as referred to in this chapter, which demonstrates the connections between various research disciplines. Although leisure and health would appear to be an integral aspect of women's lived experience it has not always been considered part of a trans/multi discipline research agenda. Likewise, enjoyment and flow have rarely been viewed as ways of accessing lived experience. This theoretical framework has been developed to encompass the interdependence, rather than the fragmentation, of these aspects of midlife women's lives.

Many midlife women have been inhibited by both age and gender but they do resist the stereotypes traditionally presented in our society. Middle-aged women are regarded as over the hill because they are past child-bearing age. Despite these views, many women in midlife are reclaiming their lives and independence and stepping into unknown territory, developing new skills and taking on new challenges. It is only in the last decade, however, that research has been conducted that demonstrates the extent of these changed attitudes and behaviour.

A methodology is needed that facilitates access to midlife women's lived experience and thereby helps to provide an understanding and a way of conceptualising their lives holistically. An interactionist approach would appear to be appropriate for providing the research data needed to develop a theory that encompasses the personal experiences of women in midlife. The following chapter describes the process of selecting an appropriate methodology, a feminist phenomenology, to gain an understanding of midlife women's lives.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The process of deciding on an appropriate methodology for this research involved two factors: my first concern was that, as the researcher, I identify myself as a feminist and therefore the approach would include feminist perspectives. These concerns are developed later in the chapter. The second was the need to choose a research methodology that would both enable the participants to describe the meanings for them of their lived experience of enjoyment, leisure and the menopause in midlife and also provide a technique to interpret these descriptions.

Kent (1994) discusses the difficulties she had in reconciling her chosen methodology (a phenomenological approach) with a personal feminist perspective and her desire to make explicit a "feminist standpoint methodology and how both could be shown to be integral to the way the research was carried out" (p. 42). There is no apparent acknowledgement in the philosophy of phenomenology of gender and sexual difference awareness. This gender neutrality poses problems when the issue of 'bracketing' is raised. Bracketing refers to the notion of presuppositionlessness where predetermined beliefs about the phenomena that is being researched are suspended. Because this feminist research was conducted by a woman and has women subjects the notion of suspending all my feminist consciousness when interviewing was almost impossible. I will return to this dilemma later in the chapter.

This chapter focuses on a methodology which incorporates a phenomenological approach informed by feminist theory. The specific purposes are to:

- discuss the main research paradigms (including phenomenological and feminist approaches);
- show that the techniques chosen to generate the data, are appropriate in terms of the research issues.

THE RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Research paradigms or frameworks can be characterised according to the underlying purpose of the research, whether this is to predict, understand, emancipate or deconstruct (Schaffer 1994). A methodology refers to the

philosophic framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective (van Manen 1990) and is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed (Harding 1987). The methodology needs to be chosen according to the purpose of the research to provide a philosophic framework from which the researcher can choose an appropriate method to conduct her study.

A research method is a technique (or way of proceeding) for gathering evidence (Harding 1987). The two conventional methods used by researchers to gather evidence are quantitative and qualitative. In terms of the different research methodologies, researchers using a positivist approach would employ a quantitative method to collect data while researchers using a phenomenological, critical or post-structuralist approach would use a qualitative method or a combination of both. Traditionally, quantitative data have been seen as 'hard' and qualitative as 'real and deep' (Fielding & Fielding 1986). They illustrate different epistemological assumptions, on the one hand a positivist approach which "sees a single unseamed reality existing 'out there'" (Stanley & Wise 1993, p. 6) and on the other a constructivist approach which attempts to interpret and define reality and places the researcher as an active presence in the research. In practice these two methods suggest different ways of collecting information, of "finding out about the world" (Ripper 1992). Ripper also suggests that to emphasise the differences constructs them as dichotomous and that perhaps they could be best described as points on a continuum, or even phases in a cycle. She further states that,

they can [and I would suggest should] be used in combination to complement each other. This can be done so as not to compromise the goals or theoretical assumptions of either approach (p. 1).

Fielding and Fielding (1986) also argue that,

ultimately all methods of data collection are analysed "qualitatively", in so far as the act of analysis is an interpretation, and therefore of necessity a selective rendering, of the "sense" of the available data (p. 12).

This research on midlife women is predominantly undertaken from a qualitative approach to understand the subjective worlds of the participants in terms of their lived experiences of enjoyment, health and wellbeing as well as leisure.

CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY

The main focus for this research is on the meaning of enjoyment to midlife women and theories of health, leisure and enjoyment have provided the theoretical framework and approach for the study. The methodology for this research needed to take account of:

the degree to which leisure is in fact a multidimensional phenomenon taking place against far richer horizons than heretofore dominant research models have acknowledged, whether these horizons be defined, for example, in gender, political, economic or cultural terms (Hemingway 1995, p. 34).

One of the major problems in the study of leisure has been the inability to describe what it is that is being studied. "What may be perceived as leisure to one person may not necessarily be leisure to another" (Henderson 1991). The early concept of leisure that has been based on the male experience of free time, after work there is leisure, does not 'fit' with the way women and many men experience their lives (Deem 1988; Green *et al.* 1990). The word leisure itself is also problematic in terms of whether it is appropriate to encompass meanings which include fun and enjoyment (Podilchak 1991).

As Bella (1989) argues:

a new approach is needed, which will give primary importance to people's understanding and perceptions of their own lives, rather than relying on androcentric and dichotomous concepts such as work and leisure (p. 166).

Leisure, as previously shown, is complex and multilayered with each aspect of the experience intrinsically linked to each other in an inseparable pattern of meaning. The more traditional models of positivist/modernist thinking, where a limited number of causal variables can be separately characterised, are inadequate. It is not possible to assume that the experience of leisure relates to a definite underlying reality which, given time, can be characterised and presented in a mathematical form. These methods have been challenged by some leisure researchers (Gunter 1987; Hemingway 1995; Henderson 1991) who are exploring other alternatives to interpret and study the meanings of leisure including post modernist approaches (Wearing 1994; Rojek 1996). In order to understand people's experiences of leisure, the research method needs to aim at describing and explaining these experiences. A radical departure from traditional methods is advocated by Hultsman (1995), who uses Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* (1982) and explores Taoism "to develop a broader context for understanding leisure when thought of as lived experience" (p. 87). Howe (1991), in attempting to get away from mass survey methods, suggests that the "intensive study of

the particular leisure lifestyles of a few people" (p. 60) may be useful in gaining a deeper understanding of leisure meanings.

The methodology selected for this research needed initially to enable women to describe their own enjoyable experiences and subsequently for the researcher to understand and elicit explanations of the meaning(s) of these experiences. Research undertaken from a phenomenological viewpoint is concerned with questioning the way people encounter the world and is involved with the task of describing experience (Koch 1995). It would therefore appear to be appropriate for this study because it focuses on the participant's experience of the phenomena of enjoyment and leisure in their life-world rather than on their particular actions or behaviour.

Phenomenological methods

Phenomenological research is based on lived experience and the questions that are asked are designed to uncover meaning and significance of certain phenomena (van Manen 1990), in this research, the phenomena of leisure and enjoyment. The methodical structure of phenomenology not only involves investigating experience as it is lived but also reflecting on the essential themes which are characteristic of the phenomenon.

The data are obtained by using unstructured or semi-structured interviews and these descriptive data are expressed in the participant's own words. The status of these data is open to criticism by those who view qualitative methods as being 'soft' and not capable of being quantifiable.

Phenomenologically-based work, although acknowledging difficulties in claiming that the interview material is the participants' truth, has the potential for being the most conscientious method for understanding the meaning of the experience of the phenomena being investigated (Valle, King & Halling 1989). It is a method of reflection, not from a specific discipline such as psychology or sociology but as a way of understanding the meaning of a particular lived experience (van Manen, 1990).

From a phenomenological perspective, it is possible to conduct research in a structured way without having to convert it to quantitative data (Giorgi 1970). This method approaches validity from a more general perspective, "as a conclusion that inspires confidence because the argument in support of it has been persuasive" (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 57). In response to further doubts that positivist researchers may have regarding the lack of rigour in

the phenomenological method, Howe (1991) a sociologist who has used this approach to leisure states that:

A tacit, intuitive analytical and interpretive process is not undisciplined ... social science knowledge has three sources: reason, sense, and intuition. Each yields a different type of understanding ... Leisure, as a multifaceted personal and social construction, surely is a phenomenon that is well served by investigations that offer each type of understanding (p. 60).

The final proof of success of this method is when a reader of the paper can feel that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 46).

The strength of the phenomenological method for research is that access to "naive descriptions of personal experiences" (Giorgi 1985, p. 1) can be gained from the respondents in their own words. The situated naive descriptions of the respondent's life-world, the data, which can be obtained from interviewing are then considered of primary importance in getting to know how another person is experiencing their world. This experience, which includes mental phenomena such as, dreams, memories and theories, is unique and it is from this unique experience that phenomenologists and phenomenological psychologists attempt to arrive at descriptions and understandings concerning an individual's experience of the world (Spinelli 1989). Hagan (1986) considers that the use of a phenomenologically-based approach to interviewing "restores interviews to a position of central importance in research ... thus providing a main means of access to the respondent's life world" (p. 338). Other research inquiries into nursing and health practices, have used this approach for understanding the phenomenon of caring (Morrison 1992).

Phenomenological research by feminists

Open-ended interview research based on phenomenological methodology has been used by feminist social scientists mainly in the area of women's health, for example, to gain access to women's experiences of: determining infertility and the social pressure to seek medical help (Sandelowski & Pollock 1986); recovering from hysterectomies (Webb 1984); and the perception of menopause as an embodied experience (Kent 1994). Feminist sociologists Stanley and Wise (1993), suggest that a phenomenologically based approach is ideally suited for the basic research still needed on women's oppression. It also enables, in this research, midlife women's life-worlds of enjoyment and leisure-like experiences to be analysed individually, taking into account the intersections of gender, ethnicity, age and sexuality.

Leisure research and the phenomenological method

Many leisure researchers in recent years have been dissatisfied with the traditional methods that have been used to understand leisure. The more traditional positivist methodologies in leisure research tend to pre-figure the nature of the phenomena from the start when they structure the research in terms of hypotheses that are then tested (Henderson 1991). Hemingway (1995) asserted that empirically based research has "significantly lost touch with the experience of leisure" and he states that some other approaches "must be taken to study leisure in a way that reveals more of its human fullness" (p. 33). Howe (1991) argues "for the use and appropriateness of the phenomenological paradigm in leisure enquiry" (p. 60). She challenges the positivist methods that do not take account of both the researcher's biases and the women's language other than that which is verbal or written. To ignore other data that are part of the encounter, such as body language of the subject and the researcher's own values, as though they do not exist, is to raise questions about the credibility of the findings and conclusions expressed when using these methods of research. The researcher is part of the encounter and consideration needs to be given to her role and the effect she has on the way the descriptions of the women's experiences are related. Rather than ignoring this important factor in the research process it needs to be acknowledged and recognised and then it can be set aside for the purpose of the analysis. Ashworth (1996) acknowledges these aspects and deems them important for an empathetic communication from which the lifeworld of the participant can be ascertained.

Verbal communication is traditionally the main source of data but nonverbal communications, such as observations of body language and awareness of nuances of speech and expression, can be made which provide a richer text for analysis (James 1986). With regard to using participants' verbal descriptions of experiences, memories, thoughts and feelings this can be seen as a strength, but it also could be construed as a weakness, inasmuch as it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to interview a person with poor verbal skills and with low confidence in expressing her own feelings and ideas. Reinharz (1992) also indicates some of the limitations of this technique when interviewing and says, "feminist phenomenological interviewing requires interviewer skills of restraint and listening as well as interviewees who are verbal and reflective" (p. 21). It may therefore be the case that people who volunteer to be interviewed are self-selecting according to the confidence and ability they have to talk about their own experiences.

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

There are diverse views as to what constitutes feminist approaches to research (Harding 1987; Reinharz 1992; Stanley & Wise 1993). These differences revolve around what women researchers see as the main purpose or objective of their research. The debates about feminism and feminist methodology and the dilemma of one's discipline position are illustrated in the following quote from Kitzinger (1990):

For me, being both a feminist and a psychologist means to be responsible to other feminists for my psychology, and, equally to be responsible to other psychologists for my feminism. To remain identified with each group, I need to be able to offer something positive to each. To feminism I offer my analysis of the dangers of psychobabble invading the women's movement, and my "insider" knowledge of a patriarchal discipline ... To psychology I offer my analysis of the role of rhetoric within the social sciences, a radical and social constructionist perspective as an alternative to positivist-empiricist approaches, and my "insider" knowledge of lesbianism and feminism (quoted in Reinharz 1992, p. 13).

Feminist Methodology

Feminists (Hartsock 1983; Haraway 1989; Stanley & Wise 1990; Harding, 1991) reject the idea that traditional research methodologies are appropriate for research on and for women. The traditional ways of doing research are masculine ways which treat the male as the norm and often assume that results obtained from male-only samples can be generalised to women. The exclusion and/or distortion and misinterpretation of women's experiences has led to women being "not only unknown, but virtually unknowable" (Du Bois 1983, p. 105). Because of these issues, feminist scholars have developed alternative and more appropriate techniques for their research.

Feminist methodology emerges from feminist theory and needs to take account of the major tenets of feminism. These tenets include: the beliefs that women are oppressed; the personal is political where power can be situated in personal experience; and the process of consciousness-raising that enables women to gain new understandings from new perspectives.

Grosz (1992) is concerned with the need to provide a multiplicity of methods that enable a proliferation of voices, a non hierarchical structuring of these voices and a plurality of perspectives and interests to be used in feminist research.

She states:

No one form would be privileged as the truth, the correct interpretation the right method; rather knowledges, methods, interpretations can be judged and used according to their appropriateness to a given context, a specific strategy and particular effects (p. 368).

Two broad criteria associated with the goals of a feminist research approach are offered by Osmond (1984). One is a consciousness about choice of method so that understanding women's experiences is enhanced, not constrained or limited. The other is that the process of the research be liberatory, bringing about a change of awareness in as many people as possible. The principles advocated by Cook and Fonow (1986), provide a concise summary of the fundamental assumptions of feminist methodology. These include:

- an acknowledgement of the pervasive influence of gender;
- a focus on consciousness-raising;
- an examination of the ethical concerns of the research;
- an emphasis on empowerment and transformation.

Reinharz (1992) defines feminist methodology as the sum of feminist research methods and has identified ten themes for feminist researchers.

These are:

- feminism is a perspective not a research method;
- feminists use a multiplicity of research methods.

Feminist research:

- involves an ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship,
- is guided by feminist theory,
- may be transdisciplinary,
- aims to create social change,
- strives to represent human diversity,
- frequently includes the researcher as a person,
- frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied (in interactive research) and
- frequently defines a special relation with the reader (p. 240).

In identifying these themes Reinharz also acknowledges the importance of continuing discussion, critique and debate amongst feminist researchers regarding ideas about methodology. Both the understanding that feminist social research methods are flexible and the process of the research is the determining feminist factor, rather than the method/ technique itself (Harding 1987) provide a response to any challenge to the notion of a distinctive feminist methodology. For example Hammersley (1992) argues

that some of the feminist principles can be found outside feminist research and literature. Reinharz (1992) concludes on a positive note lauding the work that feminists are doing creatively to stretch the boundaries of what constitutes research and suggests that "we are in a period of Feminist Culture Building, or Feminist Renaissance" (p. 269).

This thesis on midlife women's experience of enjoyment, their understanding of leisure, flow and the menopause fits within the framework of feminist research which, among other principles critiques non-feminist research on leisure and health, is guided by feminist theory, is multi-disciplinary, involves the researcher as a person, empowers the participants and aims to effect change in understanding women's lived experience.

Feminist and phenomenological approaches to methodology

It would appear that there are similarities between phenomenological and feminist approaches to methodology. As stated earlier, phenomenology is concerned with the meaning of experience and is a research paradigm for understanding people's lifeworlds. This approach has the potential to take into consideration the diversity of women's experiences and enable an understanding of the descriptions of enjoyable experiences to be undertaken, interpreted and described. Feminist approaches are informed by feminist theory and incorporate inter-related aspects. These include: a dialectical relationship between the participant and the researcher and the centrality and validity of women and their experiences. There would appear to be ways of combining these two approaches to provide a suitable methodology for researching aspects of midlife women's lifeworlds.

The methodology for this research is based on feminist theory informed by phenomenology. It is concerned with the meanings of experience rather than the causes of experiences, and it uses women's accounts of their experience of enjoyment and leisure-like occasions in order to describe the meanings to them of enjoyment/leisure in their lifeworlds. The research does not explore, as a philosopher would do, the 'essence' of enjoyment, which would then need to be universally valid and independent of any particular subjectivities. Instead it attempts to develop descriptions and subsequent explanations that stay at the level of individual and personal experience within the specific lifeworlds of the women. It also does not

assume that a general structure of the phenomenon of enjoyment, leisure and flow will emerge.

Despite acknowledging the appropriateness of this approach, as a feminist, the researcher was concerned with the issue of gender and phenomenological methodology. The philosophy that this is based on has been developed by male thinkers and most of the current practitioners of philosophy are male. But, as Grimshaw (1986 p. 36) points out, "it does not follow from this *alone* that philosophical theories can be seen as male in any interesting sense", neither does it follow that if women had done more philosophy they would have done it differently or that there is any distinctively male perspective that can be identified.

Feminist philosophers have problematised new things in philosophy, and problematised older issues in new ways...they have problematised the issue of gender in philosophy, and the way in which views of gender appear in philosophy not only overtly but also as a 'backdrop' to theories which may on the face of it appear to be nothing to do with gender (Grimshaw, p. 260).

This study is about midlife women and the researcher is also in midlife. In this sense she has identified herself as a woman who has her own descriptions and meanings of enjoyment, leisure-like experiences, flow and the menopause, and although having her own particular frame of reference, she would appear to share some common ground with the subjects. If the subject matter needs testing in the first instance against the researcher's own experience (Spinelli 1989) it would appear to be an advantage to have had similar, but not the same, cultural, gender and life experiences.

Bracketing, or the suspension of theoretical beliefs and biases (presuppositions) is an "important methodological principle of research based on phenomenology" (Ashworth 1996, p. 2) and enables the researcher to enter the participant's lifeworld without having a preconceived view of the particular phenomenon being researched. There are however important aspects and assumptions implicit in the research itself that cannot be bracketed, for example the general topic of the interview, which in this research included midlife women's enjoyable experiences, their particular choice and use of words and the world they are describing. As Ashworth (1996) also says "if we tried to bracket thoroughly such presuppositions, the conversations would be directionless [meaningless?]" (p. 17).

The issue of gender and bracketing is problematic. The question arises as to whether gender is implicit to the research topic and therefore can be

tentatively assumed in the research itself or whether gender is an essential feature of the lifeworld along with temporality, spatiality and embodiment. A partial answer lies in the participants' accounts as to whether there are instances that indicate personal meanings of gender, or alternatively there does not appear to be any influence of gender at all. Gender could be regarded as an essential part of the lifeworld but because there does not appear to have been any research done in this area to support either argument, and it is not appropriate to do it in this study, gender is regarded as a tentative assumption of the research topic.

However, while acknowledging that, in order genuinely to enter the lifeworld of the participant it is necessary to put aside many assumptions such as the effect of class, social environment or education, there would still appear to be some justification for the awareness of the researcher's gender and own experience. In terms of this study, the researcher would situate herself within the cohort of women who were interviewed. As a midlife woman, who has grown up with the social constructs of Australian and New Zealand white middle class culture she can empathise with some aspects of their life-worlds and also identify with some aspects of the participants' position and experience. One of her queries, therefore, as to the 'bracketing' issue, is the matter of gender when women are interviewing women. This situation represents woman-to-woman talk (Reinharz 1992) which is different from talk in mixed-sex groups. Women in Australia live in a sexist society. They experience oppression in various forms and, in some instances, topics of a particularly sensitive nature may only be discussed in a single-sex situation. While suggesting that the interview may produce a different level of disclosure in same-sex situations, there is another unresolved question regarding bracketing that could be asked, what difference does gender make in interviews? This would appear to be another important aspect that needs to be considered when bracketing is discussed. The woman-to-woman approach has the potential to provide a different understanding of the participants' descriptions of their enjoyable experiences and lifeworlds compared with a man-to-woman encounter.

The above points are raised as philosophical questions that do not appear to have answers as such, but are important matters to be mindful of regarding gender issues in phenomenological research methodology.

Feminist interviewing in research

Feminists have used interviews extensively as a research method.

Interviewing gives access to women's memories, ideas and thoughts of their experiences as expressed in their own words, thus enabling new ways of knowing (Ramazanoglu 1992) to be gleaned from the women themselves rather than through the eyes of others. Feminists who choose to use semi- or unstructured interviews are endeavouring to provide maximum control to the participants enabling them to decide on the level of disclosure, pace, terminology and measure of the issues of importance (Ripper 1992). By using a relatively unstructured interview technique it is possible to enable women to explore their own views of their lifeworlds (Hagan 1986). The process the participants go through while being interviewed provides an opportunity for them to clarify goals, develop understanding and gain insights which they can work on in the future thus allowing for the emancipatory or raised consciousness goal of feminist methodology to be realised (Harding 1987; Cook & Fonow 1986).

Belenky *et al.* (1986), in their study of women's ways of knowing, used open-ended questions "because we wanted to hear what the women had to say in their own terms rather than test our own preconceived hypotheses" (p. 11). Women interviewing women in a non-hierarchical way may provide a deeper understanding of the research topic especially if the researcher is sensitive to the non-verbal communication signs as well as the subtleties embedded in women's spoken words, for example hesitations and facial expressions. By taking into account these considerations, interviewing has the potential to redress the issue of the silencing and distortion of women's voices which can occur using other research methods, including more structured interviews. Reinharz (1992) states that:

some feminists who engage in intensive interviewing label their method "phenomenological interviewing," an interviewee-guided investigation of a lived experience that asks almost no prepared questions (p. 21).

Sandelowski and Pollock (1986) and Webb (1984), for example, used the feminist and phenomenological goals of starting with women's experiences when they interviewed women about their experiences of infertility and recovering from hysterectomies.

Listening to the women and understanding their own frame of reference Carkhuff (1980) appears to be crucial in this process of interviewing, as it is

in many counselling situations. As Hagan (1986) states:

... in qualitative research, this is where our interest lies - in getting as close to the person's understanding of her life world as possible rather than amassing facts as they appear to the researcher with her assumed access to objective reality (p. 346).

This research is being approached from a multi-positioned view of women. It does not come from one traditional theoretical perspective of feminism but seeks to understand midlife women's experiences of leisure and enjoyment from their individual perspectives.

OBTAINING THE DATA

One of the main aims of this study was to discover how midlife women experience enjoyment in their lives. The most appropriate method to achieve this was to ask midlife women themselves. The interview became the main means of data collection. Hagan (1986) in a paper entitled 'Interviewing the Downtrodden' has provided a very detailed discussion of the process and the underlying assumptions and dynamics of the interview itself. Others, particularly feminists (Greed 1990; Pringle 1988; Reinharz 1992), are also concerned with what happens in interviews. In the following section, work by Hagan and others has been used as a basis for exploring some of these issues. Some of Hagan's insights have been elaborated on and applied to the interviews which form the basis of this study. In discussing this the researcher has used the first person singular pronoun as it seemed appropriate in this context.

Some Considerations about the Interview Process

My aim as the researcher was to facilitate an enjoyable encounter, a conversation, in which the women could talk about their lives and describe experiences that they enjoyed. It was also important that the manner in which the interview was conducted adhered to feminist principles of interviewing as mentioned in the previous section. The accounts/ interviews obtained are autobiographical, shaped by each woman's choice and selective memory and by the interview process itself enabling them to think and explore their lives in terms of enjoyable experiences, leisure and flow.

I needed to adapt myself to each situation according to where and when it was being conducted, for example in their home, at my home, my office, after or during paid work. There was no particular formula that could be

applied to each situation. Although most were happy for me to visit them one of the women was quite clear about her preference and stated, "Oh no I'll come to your place and then I won't have to be the hostess and entertain you" (Bet).

When starting the interview it is deemed important to create an atmosphere in which the women feel knowledgeable (Yeandle 1984; Reinhartz 1992) and relaxed (Hagan 1986). It is suggested that beginning with some non-threatening less personal questions such as demographic data would put the participants at ease. Although this sounds like a good approach it is not always an effective solution. The choice of approach depends on the situation; there is no rigid rule. I found it necessary to try and appraise the situation and act accordingly. I had equipment that needed a power point and microphones that needed clipping on and getting this organised often helped to distract and relax the interviewee (although it sometimes made me feel stressed especially if there was not a convenient power point). I found that if I kept up a short commentary about the technology and why I was using the microphones this eased the atmosphere and enabled both of us to be more relaxed. The first statement from me involved asking them to tell me a bit about themselves, their background, work, and present situation. In almost all cases this provided a sufficient prompt to get them started.

Despite endeavouring to make the interview as relaxed as possible, it is an artificial situation, therefore the question arises as to how much monitoring went on in the women's minds about what was appropriate to say:

In the interview then as in any social encounter, the respondent will try to ensure that she is seen to be a worthwhile person in possession of socially desirable values, no matter how 'clinical' the interviewer tries to be (Hagan 1986, p. 349).

Because the subject matter was, in the main, not threatening to the women (some women probably did have problems allowing themselves to talk about what they really enjoyed) monitoring was probably a relatively minor issue in this study.

The background the women were bringing to the interview and their life experiences are an integral part of the whole process. They need to have some understanding as to what the research is about; several women had made notes and lists of their leisure activities. In this study the ways a woman perceives an enjoyable experience will depend on whether she is aware of what is enjoyable for her, the context of the experience (which

could include the environment, whether she is on her own or with others) and sometimes the particular stage of her physiological cycle she is experiencing at the time is relevant. Some of the participants would probably not have experienced this type of encounter before, but despite this very few of them found it difficult to talk about their experiences, thoughts and feelings as they related to the topic.

The issues of trust and belief regarding the women's stories are a crucial part of feminist researchers' concerns (Oakley 1981) and also the need to, in some cases, downplay my professional academic role (Reinharz 1992). No attempt was made by me to disguise my position as researcher. The information given prior to the interview, either by telephone, letter or in a published article, fully explained the purpose of the interviews. This is in keeping with feminist approaches to interviewing and the unequal power positions that can affect and bias the process (Reinharz 1992).

From a phenomenological perspective, it is maintained that significant knowledge of human life is obtainable by a genuine human relationship not a technical one (Hagan 1986, p. 352).

While the original intent was to have relatively unstructured interviews I finally decided to have more semi-structured ones after realising there were some particular aspects that needed to be covered. I had a sheet with questions, and a statement about 'flow' but the prompts and questions were not strictly adhered to. Often material was covered in a different order and sometimes rewording was necessary to ensure the women had understood. Open-ended questions were used throughout except when confirming age, number of children at home and living arrangements when they had not been mentioned in the general course of the interview.

The women were all aware that I was interviewing them for my research degree and were no doubt trying to be helpful although mostly I felt they were being genuine. Many of the women thanked me for providing them with the opportunity to talk to someone about their lives and for enabling them to gain some insights and new directions and make sense of their own experiences (Gray 1992).

HOW TO INTERPRET/CONSTRUCT/ANALYSE THE DATA: THE RESEARCHER AND THE DATA

One of the issues to be resolved, during the interview and when the transcript is being reviewed, is the question of relevant and redundant data (Hagan 1986). So-called irrelevant data can be very relevant to the women's world and provides a context in order to clarify what they are saying. This was a hard lesson for me, thinking I could edit out irrelevant (according to my frame of reference) ramblings, but I soon found out that not until the whole analysis was complete was it possible to know what was totally irrelevant. As Hagan (1986) states,

The subjectivity of the researcher is the very means of access to the meanings and themes which make up the qualitative description. All of the description is seriously considered precisely as the respondent described it, before the particular concerns of the research focus are applied and allowed to organise the material (p. 339).

The data that are obtained from the interviews provide the naive descriptions of the participants' meaning of enjoyable experiences. The participants, in describing their experiences, and the researcher in her follow-up questions and comments, together build up an account of the women's life-world. The interview data are therefore subjected to a double interpretation where the first is the women's understanding of their own experiences and how they express this, and the other is my interpretation of what they have said. The women's responses cannot be described as "objective truth", but they do represent their account of the situation as they see it at the particular time, from their own subjectivity, during the interview.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD OF ANALYSING INTERVIEW DATA

"The purpose of the phenomenological method is to make sense of the data so that the world of the participant is clearly understood" (Morrison 1992, p. 243). The interview and subsequent analysis must have a broad and open perspective enabling one to see what the lived experience of the person is, regarding the phenomena that are being researched.

There have been several studies published since the late 1960s that have described the stages of analysis and development of phenomenological research methods. Polkinghorne (1989) in his paper on 'Phenomenological

Research Methods' has written details of three male researchers who were all associated with Duquesne University. van Kaam (1969) who completed his doctoral dissertation in 1958 was one of the earliest researchers to document the stages of analyses and used six steps in his study of "really feeling understood" (p. 325). Colaizzi (1978) used similar steps to van Kaam in his study of the experience of "being-impressed-by-reading-something-to-the-point-of-modifying-one's-existence"(p. 57). Giorgi (1985), in his study of 'What constitutes learning for ordinary people going about their everyday activities', suggests another set of steps in which to analyse and describe people's experiences. As Polkinghorne (1989) comments:

All three researchers, however employ a similar series of steps: (a) The original protocols are divided into units, (b) the units are transformed by the researcher into meanings that are expressed in psychological and phenomenological concepts, and (c) these transformations are tied together to make a general description of the experience (p. 55).

The phenomenological method used to analyse the transcript involves approximately six stages after the interview has been conducted: first, the whole interview is read to get a general sense of the information; secondly, the verbatim transcript is divided into meaning units with a focus on the phenomenon that is being researched; thirdly, all the meaning units are scrutinised and the psychological insights and participants' perceptions are identified, and the text is restated in the third person to enable clearer identification of this; fourthly, central themes that emerge from the participants perceptions about the research area are identified and finally a comparison of themes is made across the interviews in order to discover common themes. A re-appraisal of the literature related to the research is undertaken so that findings can be relocated within a particular context (Giorgi 1985; Hagan 1988; Morrison 1992).

The analysis of thirty transcripts is a lengthy and absorbing business. It requires the researcher to understand the subject's life world from their frame of reference. For this study, the process of analysis has required 'being with' the woman's transcript and interview tape for long periods of time in order to elicit rich descriptions of what she finds enjoyable and how she experiences the 'flow' state and leisure in her lifeworld.

A more detailed description of the process is outlined below:

Stage One: Interview with the participant focused on their experience.

The researcher asks questions of the participant in order to elicit their perceptions of the experience being studied. There is a conscious effort to

avoid leading questions, and where possible the direction of the interview is dictated by the responses of the participant. However, the interview is focused to some extent on the particular experience under investigation. The presuppositions of the researcher must be open to challenge.

Stage Two: Provisional analysis of the taped interview (ideally on the day of the interview).

The researcher carries out an initial study of the recording and makes notes about the content and themes. Any strong emotional reactions, such as laughter or tears, are also highlighted at this point. In addition, the researcher also notes their own reactions to the interview situation.

Stage Three: Verbatim transcript of the interview

The researcher spends time listening to the tapes and transcribing their content. Although this task is time consuming it has the advantage of ensuring that the researcher becomes very familiar with each of the interviews. Once the interview has been transcribed the script is read several times to get a "sense of the whole" (Giorgi 1985). The transcriptions are best put onto a word processor to assist in the next stage of the analysis.

As the interviewer and the transcriber was, in this case, the same person by the time this was done a good picture starts to emerge about the participant.

Stage Four: Initial identification of the 'natural' meaning units

The researcher combs through the transcript and numbers in sequence, the natural meaning units or blocks of text which express a self-contained meaning. Meaning units are identified by the researcher as changes in the subject matter or the activities being described. The meaning units are discriminated and numbered sequentially on the transcript. The point is to 'be with' what is being said and the manner in which it is being said. It is not obvious how anyone would defend their preference for one structuring of meaning units rather than another. The process has the practical aim of assisting the researcher doing the analysis to understand fully all that is being said. The participant's language is not altered at this stage. This initial outcome of meaning units can be altered when doing the next stage although it is important to spend time at this stage in order to be as accurate as possible before proceeding.

Stage Five: Discovering and labelling of the central meaning of each unit as intended by the participant.

The researcher tries to establish what is being said in each meaning unit. Parts that are obviously not relevant to the research may be put aside, for

example the telephone rings and is answered. A crucial consideration in this process is the need for the researcher to make explicit, and test, her presuppositions, values, judgements and so on in a serious attempt to avoid influencing and distorting the meaning as intended by the participant, while drawing on any knowledge which is available to the researcher that may illuminate the participant's own meaning. At this stage, care needs to be taken not to interpret these phrases from the researcher's frame of reference. The meaning units are restated in the third person to retain the "situated character of the subject's initial description and are the psychological equivalents of the meaning units" (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 54), that were originally stated in the participant's own words in Stage Four. An understanding of the women's own lifeworld is vital to viewing the data from their perspective and getting their own meanings of the experience of enjoyment, flow and leisure.

Stage Six: Grouping of meaning units so as to describe as clearly as possible the informant's experience.

The researcher attempts to enter the lifeworld of the participant and tries to summarise their main concerns. An attempt is made to account for all meaning units. Where the same meaning occurs at different points in the text, these are put together under a theme which accurately describes both meaning units. When a number of meaning units are found to reveal different aspects of a similar and more central theme, these are gathered together and relabelled under this more general heading.

Stage Seven: Comparison of the general themes across all the interviews

The researcher tries to establish if there are themes common within the group of participants. This is done by looking for themes which may be described as having a more generalised orientation; however, the individual findings are kept in view to avoid over generalising. This is crucial to preserve the unique understanding of the participants. In this regard, genuine haziness or ambiguity or contradiction is retained.

Stage Eight: Presentation of the results in relation to the specific research focus

The results to emerge from the previous stages of the analysis are presented in the context of the specific research interest and become the findings of the research. The results from the previous step can be used to illuminate particular aspects of the experiences of enjoyment, flow and leisure. Also at this stage, comparison with past research can be made. The findings are not directly comparable with past research results, especially those that have

used a more quantitative method. Nevertheless, other explanations and information about women's understanding of enjoyment, flow and leisure as well as the menopause can be compared with the study's results to ascertain whether they are confirmed or brought into question. If these are totally divergent then an attempt at an alternative explanation would be appropriate, provided it was consistent with the results of the analysis.

While this process was going on I also maintained the journal where ideas and comments that emerged from transcribing the interviews and the analysis process were recorded. Here are some examples:

Is it not till women are freed from the obligations of being responsible for others and the double work shift that they really can choose for themselves? Otherwise there are always the guilty feelings of 'shoulds'? (p. 2)

A new phrase 'creative work' came up yesterday, to describe work that wasn't a chore and a bore but could not be really described as 'leisure' (p. 3).

Some of the aspects of enjoyment and leisure, its the 'and, and, and' of poststructuralism that comes to mind. Am I really coming to grips with what enjoyment is? it also has difficulties for some women Raven says she had no leisure on the farm, does that mean she had no enjoyment? Also the feelings of guilt and not ever having any enjoyment while in the role of wife and mother (p. 4).

Gladys while describing enjoyable experiences brought out the importance of being accepted as a single whole person and wanting to enjoy herself without necessarily being in a couple (p. 5).

SUMMARY

This chapter has been concerned with selecting the most appropriate methodology for the research and discussing the feminist framework in which the research would best fit. Because the research questions focused on the lived experience of midlife women, a phenomenological methodology informed by feminist principles, a feminist phenomenological methodology was deemed the most appropriate. The purpose of the phenomenological method is to make sense of the data so that the world of the participant is clearly understood. Each stage of the analysis procedure is designed to ensure the data are rigorously analysed and offers the opportunity for independent validation. This approach suited my research and enabled me to apply the method to my own area of study.

As well as the staged analysis procedure outlined in this chapter there is a worked example of a section of one interview in Appendix B. The following chapter introduces the participants and addresses the problems associated with determining appropriate ways of presenting the data and the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND THE PROCESS OF PRESENTING THE FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes: a discussion of decisions adopted in determining how to write up the research and how to present it in this thesis; information on getting the sample; a table which shows the demographic details of the women; a brief synopsis of their stories and specific points about obtaining the themes from the interview transcripts.

Initially one of my main concerns in this study was to try and keep the women's stories intact. It is a principle of both feminist and phenomenological thinking that the individual is to be regarded respectfully as a person with their own identity and particular viewpoint which is not merely a set of 'variables' but should be seen as a totality. Another was to try and include all of the participants at least once in the justification of the themes and sub-themes. Each of the women had their own descriptions of the lived experience of enjoyment, menopause, flow and leisure and to do them justice I felt obliged to include comments from each of them. As I have proceeded with the analysis of the interviews and establishing the themes these aims have become more difficult to meet. The findings chapters, which follow this one, therefore present the women's words under themes that have evolved during the analysis process. One woman's response to the enjoyment question is written out in full to demonstrate the stage by stage method of analysis. (See Appendix B)

WRITING UP THE FINDINGS

It has been a central aim of this study to find out and describe midlife women's lived experience of enjoyment. The intersections of the various cultural and societal expectations of leisure and work as well as the personal level of hormonal changes including menopause have been investigated. Offering a description based on the spoken words of participants seems deceptively simple. However as an entry from my Journal recorded in January 1995, begins "I am still trying to come to terms with how to write the findings". This problem is not only about how and what to write and how to

organise the material, but also how to incorporate the research product, that is the women's experiences in their own words, into the script.

An important aspect of the research process is the selection and presentation of data. Reinharz (1992 p. 217) suggests that "feminist research can be innovative in the way the report itself is written". Unfortunately, while acknowledging this, there is very little information about writing up social science/phenomenological research in her book. Written accounts of creative and interesting ways of presenting findings appear to be few. Laurel Richardson (1990) is concerned:

not whether we will write the lives of people ... but how and for whom. We choose how we write, and the choices we make do make a difference to ourselves, to social science, and to the people we write about (p. 9).

She addresses the concerns of power, authority and privilege of the researcher when determining what is written. "As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them" (p. 10). The annexation of the women's voices, claiming their voices in the researcher's text is another difficult issue. This is almost impossible to resolve one way or the other and is 'hitting the edge' of what happens in communication, whose voice and whose story? and the need to find a way of making a bridge between them (Cook 1994).

The tendency by the researcher to attribute explanations to the participants' words can form an obstacle to a description of the phenomenon itself. What the women said to me is an articulation of their experience in the context of a question about enjoyable experiences. These accounts are of the women's 'reflected on experience', not the actual lived experience of enjoyment. There are two interpretations: the first is the interpretation the women bring to their experience which is the one they share with me and the second is the interpretation I make of what they say. While endeavouring to resolve this issue there is the possibility, and perhaps danger, that the written analysis and discussion becomes a mis-representation of the data to such an extent that it is not owned by either researcher or researched. In the final product it is the researcher who is identified as being the writer and interpreter of the words of the research participants.

In raising these issues as very real problems for the researcher, it is hoped that the reader will become more aware and sensitive to the tensions that exist between researcher and researched and also to the problems

encountered when trying to find an appropriate method for writing up the research.

The findings chapters are the result of my analysis of the individual transcripts of the women, in order to discover themes, and here I will use direct quotes from the women thus staying with the lifeworld of the participant. This will also provide the reader with more immediate access to the women in the study (Gray 1992).

THE PARTICIPANTS

The study is based on a purposive sample of thirty women between the ages of forty and sixty-five years at the time of the interview. Because the study is on midlife women the age range was determined to enable as wide a selection of women as possible:

The purpose of selecting subjects in phenomenological research is to generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analysing the phenomena, not to meet statistical requirements for making statements about distribution with a group of subjects (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 48).

It is not possible to get a statistical sample for this research since the population parameters are not known and "we do not even know whether there is a general and shared meaning of the terms "enjoyment" or "leisure" (Ashworth 1994).

In order to obtain the required number of participants with a varied range of experiences of enjoyment five different groupings were chosen in advance, and from these it was intended to find five or six participants in each. The groupings were assembled from: community centres in a northern area of the city of Adelaide; the Midlife and Older Women's Project sponsored by Council of the Ageing (SA); the 'Women's Movement' community via their monthly newsletter; Women's Studies students and graduates. The snowball method of choosing participants was used to make up the final group where women who heard about the research from others contacted me and offered themselves as participants.

The first group was recruited from two of the community centres in the northern area of the city. The coordinators of the centres were contacted by telephone and asked if they would put up a notice about the study. It was also suggested that the researcher would come out and talk to some groups, but this proved difficult. A notice and an accompanying letter was sent and followed up with a telephone call two weeks later and a list of names and

contact telephone numbers was given. These women were rung and had the study further explained and an appointment to interview them was made: five women were interviewed from this area.

The second group was from the Mid-life and Older Women's Consultative Group, a voluntary reference group for the women's festival and forum being organised for October 1992. I arranged to go to one of their meetings and spent some time explaining the study, answering questions, getting suggestions, and obtaining the names of five women who were willing to be interviewed. Many of the others were disappointed about not being eligible for the study (too old - discrimination!) I assured them I would probably be extending my research at some time and would contact them then. I also chaired the Mid-life and Older Women's Festival and held two workshops entitled 'This is Your Life - Plan to have Fun'. From these groups I got the names of several more women interested in being part of the study. Altogether ten women were interviewed from this grouping. Because it was from two separate cohorts I extended the number to include a wider range of women who attended the Festival.

The third group was from Women's Studies students. I have had hundreds of women in classes over the last 13 years, not all of them in the age group required so I asked in current classes for volunteers and also contacted women from previous years and asked if they were interested in participating. They all had had me as a lecturer in a subject on women's leisure so they are a biased group having had workshops, lectures and discussions in either 'Women and Health' or 'Women's Health and Leisure' which included examining their own particular lived experience of leisure and enjoyment. Nevertheless their descriptions of the ways they enjoy themselves are as valid as any others. The number from this group was six.

The fourth group was contacted through a women's newsletter. The most widely read newsletter in Adelaide is Women's Liberation. This has a readership of several thousand from a diverse range of women. A short article was published in the September 1992 issue (See Appendix D) with a description of the study and asking any women interested, in the age group, to contact the researcher by telephone or letter. This resulted in ten responses, three by telephone, one by letter, and the other six by personal contact when they have met up with the me in social/work/ committee occasions. I interviewed five from this grouping.

The last group was a snowball sample derived from getting names of women from friends, colleagues and acquaintances who they thought would have interesting stories to tell and who had some particular attribute that would enrich the data. Four women were identified by this method.

Originally it was planned to select the women after asking them to come to a meeting to discuss the study, and to provide a written statement about key aspects of their lives and their leisure. This was not carried out except for meeting with the Midlife and Older Women's Group. It did not appear to be useful to try and select appropriate interviewees on this information and it was decided to accept any women who responded, up to a maximum number of six in each grouping.

A total of thirty women were interviewed. The women involved in the research were informed of its context and could freely choose whether or not to participate. I gave each woman a letter with information which I later discussed with them and written consent was obtained before I did the interviews (see Appendix C for a copy of each of these documents). Participants were also advised that they could choose to withdraw from the interview at any time. The information given to the prospective participants before they agreed to be involved included a statement about confidentiality with regard to the content of the interviews. I indicated that I would give the participants fictitious names in order to ensure they could not be identified and also to respect their privacy. This is regarded as standard ethical procedure by most institutions and by researchers who are involved in social research (Gray 1992; Henderson 1991a).

Most interviews were undertaken in the women's own homes by the researcher; some were done in my office and a few were done in the women's paid work-place. The interviews lasted, on average, one hour and were taped using clip-on microphones to ensure good sound reproduction and also to be less intrusive for the respondents. They were held during the day, with few exceptions, and were mostly free from interruptions. For many of the women it was a social occasion, with food and drink being offered to me by the participants which helped make a relaxed atmosphere in which to have the interview. Few problems were encountered and I usually went away with feelings of respect for the women and their experiences and also excited about the differences and similarities of their lives that seem to be emerging. (Many of the women interviewed had either been in my university classes or attended workshops on women and leisure.

Because they were aware of my views regarding the subject I have discussed some of the issues regarding this aspect of my relationship with the participants in Chapter Nine).

ANALYSING THE DATA: WHY THESE THEMES?

The women's interviews/transcripts provided me with very rich data to work on. Although I used a phenomenological method and worked systematically through the various stages of analysis there were some variations in how I elicited the data. The interview did not rigorously adhere to the phenomenological stricture – to avoid as far as possible 'pre-figuring' the interviewees account. Apart from wanting to hear about their accounts of enjoyable experiences I also wanted to ascertain whether these women did identify with the stereotypical view of midlife women being obsessed with the hormonal issues of menopause and 'over the hill', and also ensure that their understanding of leisure and flow were discussed. Because of my 'presuppositions' I had no alternative but to insert these issues, thus 'interrupting' their accounts. Therefore, I acknowledge that the phenomenological method has been modified to suit my purpose. The themes and headings for each component of the data exhibit these different approaches which are further explained in the following paragraphs.

Leisure and Health

Although enjoyment was the major issue I was researching the initial starting point for my study had been leisure and because leisure was invariably seen by women as an inappropriate concept I was interested in asking these women the question "What do you understand the word leisure to mean?" I analysed the data from this question by using themes that elicited the women's understanding of what leisure meant for them. Current debates in the medical and feminist worlds on menopausal issues such as oestrogen deficiency disease, the use of HRT and osteoporosis have featured in many academic and popular books, articles and papers over the last few years. Because the participants in this study were midlife women I was curious to find out: if menopause was a significant factor in their lives; whether they had been affected by this literature; and (if they were in the menopausal phase) how they had managed this stage of their lives. The chapter on leisure and health brings together these two major themes and presents the findings under themes based on the main issues as expressed by the women in the interviews.

Enjoyment and Flow

Because I was interested in finding out what makes experiences enjoyable the interview started with the statement, "think back to a time when you were really enjoying yourself and tell me about it". This approach provided the women with the opportunity to describe an experience that they were familiar with and was also planned to be non-confrontational. The themes that evolved from this part of the interview provide the basis for my findings on enjoyment.

Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow had always fascinated me since reading in the 1970s about his research on surgeons who enjoy their work and experience flow while operating on patients. One example was of the surgeon while holidaying in Acapulco who chose to work in a nearby hospital because he was bored lying on the beach with his family. Because of the research on enjoyment which informs the flow theory I therefore read the women a description of flow and asked them if they could identify with any aspects of the description. I also was interested to hear if they could describe a personal flow experience. The themes for this section are based on these aspects, identifying with the flow description and the different situations that enable the women to be in a flow state.

Composing/creating an enjoyable life

In the concluding stages of the interview I asked the question "How do you see your life now?" Because the previous questions had been about specific concepts I was interested to find out if the women would describe their lives in a holistic way or whether they would separate out the different aspects of health, leisure or enjoyable experiences. I also asked them "what is your dream for the future?" and this question gave them the opportunity to expand their vision. These two questions were included to ascertain whether these women were involved, consciously or unconsciously, in a process of composing their lives.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS

The women in this study were born between 1927 and 1952. During these twenty-five years there were two world-wide events, the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s and World War II. It was a period of uncertainty, and the "economic hardship of the depression years and the social and political turmoil caused by the war" (Johnson 1993, p. 48) were to have a profound effect on the generation that was born and raised during this time.

The participants aged over fifty were either children, adolescents or young adults during the 1940s and 1950s. They were brought up in a very different world from children today. Most young women worked until they got married and then stayed at home to bear and raise their children. Because there were very few alternative roles for these women this had a significant effect on all women including their perceptions and expectations of life. In Australia the post-war economic boom which included a 'baby boom' led to the belief that the dream of owning your own house, having a car and all the latest household appliances was achievable. The reality was that women were being confined to suburban living away from social services and transport and the Australian male, the bronzed Aussie, became the dominant image of Australia (Johnson 1993). The concept of leisure was almost unknown to these women and any enjoyment they experienced was in relation to their children and in a family context.

A Brief Synopsis of each of the Participants

This type of study is only possible if there are women willing to share their experiences with a researcher. I would therefore be remiss if I did not acknowledge these women individually and give a brief description of their background and experiences. Although the thirty women were not asked to provide their own biography, I have taken information from their responses to the initial familiarising question in the interview, 'tell me a bit about yourself' and also included any other details that arose during the interview. The presentation of these synopses of the individual women is consistent with my earlier statement of regarding the participants as women with their own identity and particular viewpoint.

The women are represented in Table One in a more traditional way and this is followed by a personal synopsis, in alphabetical order of their fictitious names, which I hope will facilitate identification and provide a context in which to situate them during the presentation of the findings and subsequent discussion.

Table One

LIST OF WOMEN WHO WERE INTERVIEWED WITH THEIR
BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Name	Age	Birth place	No.ch at home	Ages of chn	Partner/ sex	Education	Employ paid
Alice	47	Aus	1/yes	adult	y/m	tertiary	yes
Andie	43	Greece	none	-	no	secondary	yes
Barb	60	UK	1/1	adult	y/m	secondary	no
Bet	62	Aus	5/no	adult	y/m	tertiary	no
Dee	41	Aus	none	-	y/m	tertiary	yes
Gale	41	Swed	2	10 & 13	no	tertiary	yes
Gladys	57	Aus	4/no	adult	no	tertiary	yes
Gloria	43	Aus	1/no	adult	no	tertiary	yes
Helena	48	UK	2/1	adult	no	tertiary	no
Jenny	45	Aus	none	-	no	tertiary	self
Josie	52	Aus	3/n	adult	y/m	secondary	no
Kate	43	Aus	one/y	12 f	y/f	tertiary	self
Lindy	43	UK	none	adult	y/m	tertiary	self
Lynne	44	Aus	2/no	adult	y/f	tertiary	yes
Mandy	46	Aus	1/no	adult	no	secondary	yes
Margie	59	Aus	3/no	adult	y/m	tertiary	yes
Mary	56	UK	2/1	adult	y/m	tertiary	no
Meg	40	Aus	none	-	y/m	tertiary	self
Merry	43	UK	2/yes	adult	no	tertiary	yes
Meryn	59	Aus	3	adult	y/m	secondary	yes
Ngaire	58	Aus	none	adult	no	tertiary	yes
Patria	63	UK	4/no	adult	y/f	tertiary	no
Patty	51	Aus	5/fost	12-30	no	secondary	SSec
Raven	47	UK	3/no	adult	y/f	tertiary	no
Rhoda	64	Aus	3/no	adult	y/m	secondary	no
Sandy	43	Aus	none	-	no	secondary	self
Sarah	51	Aus	none	-	y/m	secondary	no
Terry	53	Aus	one/no	adult	y/f	secondary	yes
Wanda	58	Aus	5/1	adult	no	secondary	no
Winnie	49	Aus	2	adult	y/m	tertiary	yes

Alice

I always wanted to go to uni [university] ever since I left school because I couldn't then 'cos we lived in the country and now this has become the main focus in Alice's life and provides the most fun and enjoyment. Alice has met other mature-age women at university and has developed a common bond with them, sharing feelings about their changing-emerging selves. Together they are questioning their choice to go to university, thus breaking away from traditional roles, but are realising it is the best thing they have done for their own sense of self.

*Alice has realised that she loves doing things on her own, **being alone and getting my own space**. She now chooses what she wants to do for a better quality of life and this can mean staying at home and studying when her husband goes 'out bush' (into the more natural environment away from the city, where outdoor pursuits such as fishing, bush-walking, camping take place) with his friends and not meeting and socialising with people that **I don't want to, like my husband's friends**.*

Andie

*Andie finds life in a new city and a new culture difficult and she dreams of a better job and more travelling. She loves reading and, when immersed in a good book, finds the time just flies. Seeing a flower grow in the rocks when on a mountain walk gave her that feeling of momentary joy – **that's the way you see the face of God**. Leisure is doing the things she wants to do whenever she wants to do them. This is not usually the case and she gets **really frustrated when there is a time limit on what I want to do**. Being in a new city where it is colder than she is used to and not having a network of friends means that Andie preferred her life before, but **it will get better**.*

Barb

*She loves walking. **When I walk along the beach I feel really there, because there's the smell and a lovely sunset**. Barb enjoys travelling, not to see things but to see people. **I like to go somewhere and get to know the people**. **My husband and I have separate holidays because we like different types of travelling**.*

*She got her driving licence when she was fifty-two and now enjoys the freedom that gives her. Barb has been studying this year and has really been enjoying it. Writing papers has become easier and she delights **in being able to get my ideas down on paper and sort them into a properly referenced piece of work**.*

Bet

She walks three to four miles every day with her husband and spends most of the time talking about 'money things' *we have all our fights when we're walking, out of the house, get it out of our system ... fighting while walking is very invigorating ... and how do you (the interviewer) know that walking and thinking of money and fighting doesn't restore my self.*

When she was in her forties she worked as a school librarian, a job that she really loved doing and eventually at fifty-four *I ran out of puff at the end.*

Bet describes her life now as *'integrated, a whole tapestry.'*

Dee

Dee feels that *one of the bravest things I did in my life was leaving my marriage* and now she is becoming concerned about her relationship with her present partner and is beginning to think about how she would live without his presence and mentoring. Work is paramount to her happiness, she needs the structure and the company of people.

Dee loves parties *I'm a party girl* and doesn't like being on her own. She really enjoys competitive sport especially netball. She feels as though she's in the 'flow' state all the time. *I feel very much in control of my life where I'm going and what I'm doing and I make sure that most of it is pleasure, not pain. And I work pretty hard at it and I recognise fairly early in the piece if something is not joyful or I'm getting stressed out. I realise its not all perfect, but I work really hard at being happy.*

Gale

She enjoys both being on her own and being with others and loves the sense of freedom of *just hopping on a train and coming to town by myself.* She regularly goes camping with friends or with her children and has fun when she's with close friends.

Gale has recently made some specific choices in her life, for example working part-time, to enable her to have time to do her other activities. It is important for her to make time and space for herself, and when she does this she feels that she is really living her own life.

She sees herself as a thinking, reading and writing person, not so much a doing person. *I'm a lateral thinker* and Gale gets *a real buzz* out of making connections with different things in her life *ultimately leisure and enjoyment and that fulfilment and flow link in together, and I suppose ultimately I'd like my life work to be enjoyment.*

Gladys

She really enjoys folk-dancing doing both circle and sacred dances. The combination of music and also the spiritual component are what she particularly enjoys. Gladys has *given up everything regular* so walks occasionally along the river near her place and is fascinated by genealogy and can get really involved in researching family history. Gladys makes sure she has a *good holiday every year* and this is often a bush-walking holiday with a particular woman friend or a group.

When thinking about her life now, in the act of composing her life, Gladys sometimes wonders *whether it doesn't have enough challenges in it ... that feeling about what else is there?* She lives on her own and although she is reasonably content when she feels lonely *it would be nice to have another few closer friends ... it's just this having to always be the initiator which is not me, and that's an effort for me.*

Gladys has ten grandchildren, *and I enjoy them, but I'm happy to see them, and happy to see them go.*

Gloria

Gloria sees herself at a very exciting stage of her life, a time when she feels she can do anything she wants. Midlife is a time of reaping the benefits of her decision to leave her marriage. As she said *I knew that if I wasn't going to resent anything in my life before I died I knew that I needed to leave and live independently. So that's very significant in my life, how I've been tied up with a family and then needing to leave the family.*

She has financial security, a permanent job and a house, and is now sorting out what she really wants. There are many occasions when she sees herself as getting really involved in activities and can lose herself in these. She is also aware of a need for time by herself to sort out the directions she wants to take next. There appears to be some confusion and contradiction about what she really thinks, and where she wants to go, but she says she knows her life is good now. *I know now I've been able to make the choices I've wanted to, most of them in my life. So that's why midlife is pretty special its good for which I'm thankful I have a body that supports me most of the time with that.*

Helena

Gestures, a theatre company would have to be the most fulfilling part of my life and second the drama study. She had always wanted to study drama.

*Helena enjoys learning Hebrew and 'supposes' it is funny that she enjoys work. She has a radio project *on the go* at present which she is thoroughly enjoying and is totally involved with doing the research for it.*

Despite being on a Disability Support Pension, Helena feels her life now is fulfilled. The pension enables her to do her creative radio work and manage her chronic ill health.

Jenny

Jenny is very conscious of who she is and what is happening in her life.

I've lived half of my life so I'm on the other half and there's not going to be another half, so this half has to be the best and I'm the only one who can make it the best. She feels that her life is full of leisure and she does not find any part a burden. I enjoy what I'm doing so I put myself there, whether it's cutting the grass out there, and I enjoy that, and so then I set it as a challenge and do it well.

*She has done some 'work' on herself and feels she is a pretty reasonable person to know, unlike some of her friends *they don't want to feel the pain. Now I've done a lot of that, but there's still a lot more to do, we never stop really.* She does have some doubts about ever getting it all together, but I feel confident that I'll be able to deal with whatever comes along.*

Josie

Josie is a 'little Aussie battler' and has had a hard but interesting life, dealing with sickness, drug dependency and now more debilitating illnesses but, throughout, she has kept on making a life for herself.

*She attended the Festival for Midlife and Older Women in Adelaide and it was here that Josie heard *sixty and seventy year old ladies saying they were going back to Uni. That virtually blew me apart and I'm still talking to people about it, that was really enjoyable being with them.**

*It was also her birthday and when a hundred or so women all sang Happy Birthday to her at the last session she felt *very special.**

*Leisure for Josie is *doing what I want to do. You can be doing something that is really hard to do ... I suppose leisure is being able to shut off when you want to, and pick up what you want to do when you want to ... you've got to have time out or you'll burn out ... it's not easy to close off ... that's really hard.**

Kate

Kate is full of confidence in her ability and what she is capable of doing.

As a consultant her work involves *running workshops, I get a real buzz, when I'm being powerful, or leading well, and I do lead well I get a sense of ... it's the same thing its not the exhaustion I feel around physical, but it's a buzz and excitement.*

She has developed a lifestyle that 'flows' and is not divided into sections, *I could possibly describe my life as a leisure lifestyle.* Kate still gets a 'high' from physical activity and loves feeling the strength of her body.

She generally lives *with a lot of excitement about being alive.* She has also got very definite ideas about being financially 'well-off' and having her debts/mortgages paid off before she is fifty.

Lindy

Lindy has chosen to explore other choices for living her life. *I'd been thinking about it a few years before that, I'd been thinking there must be more to life than this. I had a job and a son and I had a really good relationship, but I kept thinking something's missing so that was the start of the whole process of wanting to explore other avenues.* She has not had a paid job for over twelve years during this time she has studied at university and taken courses in various alternative health practices. She is very conscious of not wanting to force herself to do something she doesn't really want to, for example taking a job to get money to pay off the mortgage or doing some form of exercise that she does not like to get fit. As she says, *I haven't found anything that I really enjoy doing in the form of exercise.*

Lindy is trying to live a life that is integrated or holistic not compartmentalised, so that she feels content most of the time. *Some days I just wake up happy, for no specific reason.* Since her son has stopped living with her she has found more time to work on what she really wants out of life and has a companionable relationship with her male partner.

Lynne

Lynne enjoys her role as a Women's Studies teacher, and a particular time when she was away on a camp with the students was a highlight for her. She has chosen to make big changes in her life in midlife. She moved out of her marriage a few years ago and now lives with her female partner. This took a lot of courage and her family expectations weighed heavily on her while she was making this decision. *I am very content with my life now, I have a lovely lifestyle.*

As far as leisure is concerned, Lynne thinks *it doesn't need to be separate from work, see it as the opposite of tedium and boredom, as when I'm thoroughly enjoying myself and at peace with myself and the world. And it could be any time.*

Lynne feels she can mostly choose to do what she wants but needs to keep some of her indulgences for treats so that they really are treats, not just everyday happenings.

Mandy

Mandy enjoys gardening and she makes teddy bears, *I'm in the teddy bear club*, she also makes all her own clothes, except her bras.

Now that her daughter is *off my hands I can do what I like to do*. She feels that time gets away, when she is in the garden, *that's the only time when time and reality get right away, its doing something you enjoy ... Indoors there's always a clock around ... so I'm aware of time inside*. Mandy has an interesting life, *well most things are fun, hectic, happy, I'm having a good life reasonably contented and peaceful most of the time*. She enjoys her independence not having to adjust to another person, and would like to travel more in Australia.

Margie

She thinks *it has taken me a long time until I suppose about mid-life to realise that I've been postponing the rest of my life long enough and that I eventually had to face the fact that I was doing this and do something about it*. She has also discovered that it is amazing how age does not matter, *it's only a 'time thing' that has been 'man-made' anyway*. It is not a barrier for her and some of the happiest times she has spent have been with people almost half her age.

Margie has always been a physically active person and when describing a canoeing trip that she had done recently said, *I just enjoyed that more than I could possibly describe*. She has a love of water *it fascinates me it brings a calmness and peacefulness that gives her a very enjoyable experience*.

Music has been a large part of her life, but she has outgrown her youthful enthusiasm for it and only plays or listens to music when she knows she will not be interrupted.

Now in midlife she is making the most of her independence from family responsibilities and is involved in searching for fulfilment and ways of providing challenges for herself. *I've discovered that with all the things I've been doing, to feel happy I have to keep on learning. The whole of life is a learning experience, satisfying ones rather than traumatic ones, a curiosity*

about oneself, discovering how far one can go in various activities reading about things are of interest and following them up, I just have to do that.

Mary

Mary regards herself as a woman who likes being a bit daring. She enjoys challenging the stereotype of being a housewife and mother, especially now that her family is grown up. Sport and physical activity have always been a part of her life. *My body feels good when I'm outside being active ... and I love climbing ... only banks and little hills now.*

In recent years she has gone back to study, a new beginning and this has given her a different perspective on her life. *My life now is really good I'm at a time of my life when I'm really enjoying myself.* Now in midlife she often imagines living somewhere by the beach on my own. While acknowledging that this may be hard and *could be sad at the beginning*, she regards it as another new beginning.

Meg

Over the last few years Meg has lived in dread of turning forty and *I really thought about how I was going to deal with it.* She is determined to be healthy and fit, and so *for the last five years or so I've been looking at how I can remain healthy.* Her husband is a paraplegic and she is aware that he will *probably be quite sick before he dies. And he will probably die before me. He's 5 years younger than me and he's in reasonable health now and I see that as a bit of a constraint.*

Meg is really quite happy looking after her house and the garden and whatever else comes along. She is a masseuse and gets really involved in doing a massage and is *not aware of the outside world, so I'm really there.* She also feels that her life is not something *about one single incident it's more like this is the path I'm meant to be on.* Meg feels very well nurtured and has lots of opportunities to do different things and stay healthy.

Merry

Merry is aware that she takes a responsible attitude towards her life, and acknowledges that she has *become rather too serious as an adult.* She has had to bring up her two sons on her own after her husband died. Getting a well paid job that did not require too many qualifications was seen as a necessity. Now she has to keep working to pay the mortgage but she has found that she just loves gardening, *I take a great delight in it, seeing things grow ... that's my pleasure.*

Merry not only needs plenty of exercise for her physical wellbeing but she also needs to be amongst green living things for her mental wellbeing. Gardening provides both these needs, as well as enjoyment, feelings of flow and her leisure. When talking about her life now Merry said *I get lonely sometimes for a close emotional relationship 'cos I haven't had one for a few years now*. Her sons who are still living at home provide her with company and generally, she is content with the life.

Meryn

Her first job was working for the National Fitness Council and this was the beginning of a lifetime of working with people, including being involved with Human Relationship Courses for fifteen years. She has never had any formal tertiary training *a lot of the experience I gained was on the job*.

Meryn has found that lately there has been a difference in what is important for her: *I've become more self-centred as I've got older. I'm now making choices and doing things I want to do I feel good and happy about that*. She is moving into all kinds of areas such as spirituality and natural therapies. Meryn also enrolled in a Women's Studies course at a local college, *I thoroughly enjoyed it, it was wonderful, that was a great experience for me*. She belongs to a women's group that meets regularly and also goes away on weekend trips. *It's great fun, I get totally involved*, and also she has been away on holidays with a woman friend on walking trips *and that was a wonderful time*. She finds the *here and now is the most interesting time*. As far as the future is concerned she feels she is a fairly resourceful person, like her mother, and feels that she will find things *to fill her wish list*.

Ngairie

The wonderful times of her life have been when she has been doing things for other people. She has fond memories of times before her daughter was born of going to parties with her husband and *frolicking around together*. She loved being with farming people, with no alcohol but lots of laughing and joking, *it was just fun like being a kid again, I guess*. Since being on her main enjoyment is reading, *I read and I read and I read*. Ngairie now feels that she has a whole lifetime ahead of her but needs to wait until her cat and dog die before she can *kick up her heels*.

She is aware of moving in to *a useful phase of her life*, not being controlled by others but feeling freer to do the things that she really wants to do. Ideally she would like to have a campervan and live where she pleased, and *live the simple life and to do art*.

Patria

It is only since she retired four years ago that Patria has begun to think about what *I really want to do rather than what I'm doing out of habit or what I do because my husband wanted to do it. Now, it's much more I'll do this because I want to. So that's been wonderfully, freeing.*

For her leisure is when she can sit and read or walk *just for me, and I'm not responsible for anyone else.*

Her life now is very pleasant, and full of possibilities. She lives with her partner, a woman, and is enjoying good health and the opportunities to do things like travelling. She described a recent holiday she and her partner had in France, *I love speaking French and I love the markets and the streets and the village and the whole sense of community that I get when I'm in France. That was a great pleasure to me, it was spring and the country was so beautiful.*

Patty

She gives *most things a go* and has about *nine million hobbies, I do complete some of them!* She certainly gets the most out of her life, although as she says *for a while there my get up and go went* and now its coming back again so she is making the most of it. So now it is *Righto, lookout world I'm back in action.*

Patty recently took up kayaking and is *totally wrapt in it.* Also, going on a Fun Run with her grandson provided the challenge that she needed to get her energy back again. Flying is her passion and when she went up in a DC3 she thought she would *burst I was so happy, fabulous.* Her motto is *if you don't try anything ... her kids are getting used to it now* and they are saying *ooh for your eightieth I suppose you want to try parasailing or something like that.*

When she is sixty Patty is *going to go around Australia on a camel, if I can afford to buy the camel! I've got nine years to save for it!* The over-riding theme for Patty is, like Josie, a 'little Aussie battler': she has a great sense of humour, is enthusiastic and positive about her renewed energy and has a real zest for life.

Raven

One is actually not supposed to enjoy things, one is supposed to get on and do, and therefore Raven always had the connotations of guilt and selfishness attached to enjoyment. It was coming out of the marriage that helped sort that out. I stopped being a wife.

In midlife she has a change of attitude, and a belief that she is allowed to enjoy herself that was not there before. Raven does not necessarily equate leisure with enjoyment, as when she has a migraine and is lying around – it is hard to define leisure, *as yet there isn't a good definition.*

Raven had no leisure on the farm and I see that as having no time to myself. Now that I'm virtually living in retirement I see myself having a lot of leisure time. Time when I can do what I like.

Rhoda

Rhoda would not like to be at home alone doing nothing, all the time. *I've chosen to do the things that appeal to me and that I do get enjoyment from ... I only do things that I can find a use for.* Whether these are leisure or not is another question, she would say they were essential to survival to have a quality of survival. She sees no reason for anyone to be *lonely, miserable, not occupied and not have interesting things to do.*

Rhoda feels the opportunities are there if you want to choose them, and she makes the most of her life. She has a real need to be in contact with people and generally speaking, life is good. Being on a pension is restrictive in terms of being able to do things spontaneously, a lot of planning is needed.

Sarah

The Faith [Baha'i] is my recreation, it is my life. Sarah is enjoying herself and is looking forward to a new era with possible changes in living situation and travel involved. *I love working on computers ... I've been doing that for ten years, by having a CompuServe Account I've met people all over the world, including one in the UK and one in Alaska. I'm having a lovely time, it's wonderful.* This interest of using the internet has partly taken the place of reading for her.

Sarah loves going for walks either in the bush or along the beach. When she is a bit upset or unsettled she prefers to be in the bush. *I find if I'm down then on the beach makes me feel more down. But trees, I have a great affinity with trees.* Also Sarah is quite deaf but recently she has been fitted with new hearing aids and she can hear the birds, *so it's a real thrill every time I hear birds.*

Life is a little unexpected, so that's exciting and challenging and I'm very happy about it.

Sandy

Sandy is a lesbian, feminist herbalist/masseuse/counsellor and she has spent most of her time with women. Over a period of years she rebuilt an old house and reforested over ten acres. *It was women's land and it became a retreat place for women coming from Hobart and it became a healing place and a creative place and women would come and do all sorts of things.*

A devotee to physical activity in many forms, it has always been part of her life, she enjoys setting herself physical challenges and pushing her boundaries and really loves adventures. *There are lots and lots of times when I have felt really good within myself and really happy.* For her, paradise is living in the country in a community of women, a health retreat.

Terry

Her main enjoyment is gardening and she is happy if she can have \$10 to have a bet and have a beer. *I'll go up to the pub with the old boy over the back. I generally mix with the males down here. Go and get wood with some of the guys. I just fit in, I get on better with the males they seem to talk my language.*

At the weekend she is just as happy being at home pottering around doing things. *I don't need to go out, I'm happy, I'm content.* As far as leisure is concerned *we don't have much of it.* When she comes home from work *there's dishes, there's animal's cages to clean out, in winter time you get right behind, especially now with all the rain.*

Terry feels that she is probably going through the best years of her life now, *I'm just happy being fifty-three, I'm not frightened of getting old.* She doesn't bother what anyone thinks, and she and her female partner have got what they want.

Wanda

Wanda has trouble having fun, always feeling as though things aren't quite right, or finished, *I've got this perfectionist streak in me.*

She loves reading and especially Simone de Beauvoir, *I find her a fascinating lady, I don't know whether I like her morals, but she's fascinating.* *Her stamina to do things and the way she got them done, is just great.*

Wanda is learning Italian and *there doesn't seem to be enough time in the day to do all the things ... by the time I walk the two dogs, I find time just*

goes ... *I have fun in spurts. She does volunteer work for a charity organisation, Goodwill, we have fun up there we fool around, insult each other we get a lot of laughs. She finds it very difficult to slow down and just 'be'. Her life now is full, full, full too full sometimes, I'd like to rearrange it, I am busy, most of the time, life can be frustrating but never boring.*

Winnie

Winnie has established a life as a single, independent person that she enjoys, *thinking in terms of just herself, being autonomous.* Her children are not central to her living situation now. She is very conscious of the importance of having a good network of friends, particularly women friends.

Her childhood days on the farm are now being relived as an adult, going back to her roots as a country person. She maintains a balance of work- both part-time paid and farm maintenance. Solitude is a continuing theme and she enjoys spiritual rituals that honour the female.

Winnie initiates opportunities to have new experiences on her own and with others, particularly with women, *mostly everything that I enjoy happens outside.* She enjoys taking on new challenges and achieving tangible results, such as building a new bathroom and a free-standing studio on her property.

She is now fifty years old and becoming more aware of her own and her parents' mortality and coming to terms with sickness and death.

SUMMARY

The issues regarding analysis and presentation of interview data have been raised in this chapter. These include the difficulties of maintaining the feminist principle of enabling the participants to become empowered in the process as well as being conscious of the need, when writing up the interviews, to ensure the women's voices are not overtaken by my interpretative statements.

In the following three chapters, I present the findings from the interviews. My primary research was concerned with initially investigating two selected aspects of women's lived experience, their understanding of the concept of leisure as well as how menopause relates to their health. The findings of these two aspects are presented in Chapter Six. Because I was also interested in investigating concepts that could defy segmentation in women's lives I asked the women for their descriptions of enjoyable experiences as well as a

question about the concept of flow. These two aspects are presented in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight extends the notion of midlife women regarding their lives as a whole rather than being segmented and develops the concept of these women in the act of composing their lives.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS PART 1

LEISURE AND HEALTH

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with the women's descriptions and understanding of leisure as well as their experience and/or concerns about their health in terms of the menopause. The first section presents the findings on leisure which are based on both the women's experience of leisure as well as their views on what leisure means to them. They were not asked to define leisure, or describe leisure *per se*, but towards the end of the interview after talking about themselves and their lives, their enjoyable experiences and whether they identified with the 'flow' concept the women were asked to explain what they understood by the word 'leisure'.

The second section provides the findings of the women's concerns, and understanding about menopause which is the aspect of their health that dominates the research on midlife women's wellbeing. Research on midlife women inevitably has a focus around the issues of the menopause. Although this study is more concerned about enjoyment it would also appear to be appropriate to find out what are these women's experiences of menopause.

In all three Findings chapters I have endeavoured to enable the women's words to 'speak for themselves'. The themes and sub-themes emerged from the transcripts during the process of analysis. While there is some similarity among the women's accounts, there is also a great diversity of understanding about what they mean by leisure, their experience of leisure and the menopause. This serves to illustrate the importance of working from people's 'lived experience', since – though some conceptualisations are widely shared and may be the very outcome of socially-available discourse – conceptualisations can be remarkably personal.

LEISURE

The length of the list of themes (see Table Two below) in itself indicates the diversity of these women's understanding and perception of leisure. Their responses in the interview could be said to be informed in many cases by their previous descriptions of enjoyable experiences and their lives as a

whole. This would possibly affect the women's comments and perhaps place their understanding of leisure in a wider context than would otherwise have been envisaged had the whole interview revolved around the use of the single word leisure.

There was a degree of uncertainty about what leisure meant for them when they spoke about leisure time and the work/leisure dichotomy. It did not always fit the way they regarded their lives. They wrestled with the issue of if work is enjoyable, is it leisure? And also the inappropriateness of the word. For many of these midlife women leisure is regarded as part of their whole life. As Lindy said *leisure and things that are enjoyable are just part of my whole life, not separate*. The women talked about leisure as being something *you enjoy* (Meryn) and *pleasure and leisure sort of goes together* (Barb). They are in the process of learning to know what they want and what suits them. Leisure could be defined as Andie said, *doing what I want to do when I want to do it*.

Table Two

LEISURE THEMES

The dubious concept of leisure

Uncertainty

Not sure
An inappropriate concept
It's a marketed commodity
A leisurely style

Unpacking the concept of leisure

The Time Factor

Leisure time
Structured time
Limiting the time changes the meaning
Getting older, running out of time
Unobligated time
Time for self

Work and leisure

The work-leisure dichotomy
If work is enjoyable, is it leisure?
Returning to study
Limits to leisure

The lived experience of leisure

My very own time

No responsibilities
A choice
A breathing space
Integration
Making the most of opportunities available

The unity of leisure

Not separated out
Leisure is fun pleasurable
Planning ahead
Re-creation

The dubious concept of leisure

Uncertainty

Not sure – 'There isn't a good definition'

The women were asked to talk about what they understood by the word leisure and not necessarily describe a leisure experience. The comments that follow indicate the ambivalence these women have with regard to the concept of leisure.

Defining leisure is in the same category as trying to understand what's time, or what's money, I'm not sure what either three of those are. Patty

... so I think it's how you define leisure as enjoyment, or whether you're defining leisure as doing nothing or not working or ... as yet there isn't a good definition ... I don't particularly like definitions because I think they're so individual, especially for this. Raven

Well what's leisure for one person is not what others think. Jude

An inappropriate concept – 'it's not me', 'it's not a word I would use'

Leisure is not a word I would use for myself or my activities. Winnie

Leisure doesn't mean a lot for me ... but leisure isn't a word I would use, it's not a really good word, I resist it ... it sounds like older people it's not me ... I don't know what word I would use, I don't think it's a really good word. No that is why I'm dismissing them both, [leisure and recreation] no it doesn't incorporate that state of mind and that's mainly what my free time is more. Kate

It is probably not a word I would use. Dee

It's a marketed commodity – The 'lounging around the pool' trendy view

Leisure is associated with media images of 'beautiful people' lying around doing nothing. As Helena said *I associate leisure with swimming or walking or lounging around in a white bath-robe on a chaise-longue, with an umbrella above and somebody bringing me a nice drink.* (This was followed by much laughter, as if to ask when does this ever happen?)

Leisure for Kate has connotations of lying back in the sun and for Merry it conjures up a picture of a trendy matching white parachute silk outfit with

Puma shoes and matching sweat bands, and I know I don't do anything like that so ...

I associate it with advertising and marketing, glossy brochure and magazines for holidays with travel and packages with outfits and clothes ... it's not a word I use for myself or my activities at all ... I think it's a marketed commodity ... Winnie

A leisurely style – 'when you can go slow'

Helen questions, *Is that what leisure is? languid and leisurely.*

Wanda's description captures this meaning when she said It's when you can go slow, that's a leisurely style ... in the winter with a nice book by the fire with no interruption, a nice log fire and a nice comfortable chair with the rain beating on the roof, and in the summer walking in the Botanic Gardens going to the Art Gallery mmmm, sitting, when it was not too hot, on the sidewalk cafes and watching the people go by. after church one Sunday I went and that was leisurely and nice and relaxed.

'Unpacking' the concept of leisure

The traditional meaning of the word leisure, as in time and the work-leisure dichotomy is unravelled in this segment. The women indicated there was a difficulty when trying to come to terms with the traditional concepts of work and leisure in their lives.

The time factor

Leisure time – 'disposable time', 'non-work time'

For Gladys and Mandy *leisure happens at the rest of the time [they are] not at work, non-work time.* And Margie commented *it's time for me to indulge my fancies. Maybe another phrase would be disposable time.* [laughter]

Terry feels that she and her partner have little time for leisure: *We don't have much of it, do we? I mean honestly we don't,*

Wanda is concerned about her lack of leisure time and is *hoping at Christmas to sit down and reassess things, and do the things I'm doing but reorganise them so I've got more leisure time.*

Structured time – 'fitting into a structured pattern, I'd rather be by myself'

Patty has some definite ideas about leisure and the time factor. She feels that *leisure is too structured, structured leisure time, everyone must conform to doing things and having their homes look the same. My eldest daughter and her family fit in to that, it's sort of ooh today is Saturday from the hours*

from 2 – 5p.m. we will enjoy leisure! It's structured – I shy right away from it. If they said I'm going boating today from 2 – 5 I'd pull right away from it, because much as I'd like to go boating I'd feel as though I was fitting into a structured pattern I'd rather be myself, does that make sense?

Limiting the time changes the meaning – 'it doesn't become leisure'

It becomes a bit tedious when you think I have five hours to do what I want and only five hours and you place a limit on it and then try and change the time and make it worthwhile, and in the end it doesn't become leisure, it becomes something else. Andrea

Getting older and running out of time – 'never have enough time'

Several women were concerned with the lack of time to do, as Alice said *all the things I want to do*. Both Andrea and Meg commented on the feeling they were running out of time.

I have five to ten good years, and I have to do as much as I can or pack as much as I can. Andrea

I've still got forty years to do all this and I'm really determined ... I really drive myself and I've got this huge list of things I want to do. Meg

Unobligated time – 'when there's not something that has to be done'.

Patria thought that *leisure is all the time when there's not something that has to be done*, and Wanda talks more in terms of *free time or uncommitted time*. For Mary it is when *I haven't got to take the dog for a walk and even though I'm enjoying it, in the beginning it's, Oh I've got to take the dog for a walk, but once I'm out I'm getting pleasure, but I don't look on that as leisure for myself.*

Time for self – 'it's my time'

Several women said that they understood the concept of leisure in the context of, as Alice said *having time for herself really for Gladys ... time for myself* and Mary ... *time to myself*.

I had no leisure on the farm and I see that as having no time to myself. now that I'm virtually living in retirement I see myself having a lot of leisure time. Time when I can do what I like. Raven

Margie and Barb regard leisure as their own time where *pleasure and leisure sort of goes together*.

And it could be at any time, yes this [the interview] is leisure, this is an absolute pleasure for me. Lynne

Work and leisure

The work-leisure dichotomy – 'opposites', 'complementary' or not 'polarised'

A comment from Bet describes this problem: *When I was forty my job turned into a hobby, a passion so it was leisure, it wasn't leisure because it was hard work, but it was something I would have chosen to do and enjoyable. Gloria finds for me leisure is anything that isn't work, but work is very important in my life, but yes leisure is what happens at the rest of the time I'm not at work now.*

Winnie does not regard leisure and work as polarities: *I have my paid work which is twenty hours a week, I'm responsible and committed to that and I make sure there are no hay seeds in my hair and muck under my fingernails when I go to work but the other twenty hours of the forty hour week are work days for me. I think of them as work days, because they are the days I attend to business at home, farming business, like maintenance basically, and I resent other people making assumptions that they are leisure days ... But certainly leisure as opposed to work, those two polarities, I've never thought in those terms, but the non-working ... I have a long non-paid working week.*

It's often combined, hard work can be leisure, like when I went up to Mannum to help my daughter move into her new house. Meryn

Lynne raises another aspect of work when she commented: *I won't say it's not consciously work or an effort 'cos it might be, walking up a hill is an effort but the effort is wonderful and there is enjoyment and pleasure in the effort.*

Gale has a thoughtful response to the issue and sees leisure ... *not as an alternative to work but as complementary. We need work ... I think work is fundamental not only to earning a living but fundamental to constructing ourselves and to our existence ... And leisure is also important, they both nourish us in different ways ... I think they both should be enjoyable and meaningful and fulfilling and even spiritual.*

If work is enjoyable, is it leisure? – 'I really enjoy my work'

Work [paid] satisfied me in all those sorts of things, my time and pleasure. I didn't do any studying as such, but the teachers I worked with they were a great vast store of knowledge. It was ... all those things I think leisure is, it was stimulating and of course it was very people orientated ... and the day

would go really quickly and that was one of the reasons I felt so bereft, [when her son had an accident and became a quadriplegic], I had not only lost my work, I had lost my pleasure in a sense it as well was gone. Barbara

I suppose things like gardening is work and leisure, depends what your definition of work and leisure. To me work is something I have to do to earn a living and maintain the lifestyle I have and leisure is something I do because I want to. Merry

Raven, musing on the issue, identifies some of the difficulties that arise for her: [Leisure is] *doing things that aren't work. I guess work are things that have to be done to earn a crust. But then ... it could be the ironing ...*

M. Some people love ironing

R. Well I actually don't mind it, but it is work.

M. Is it?

R. Yes of course, it's not enjoyment, I don't mind it but, um I wouldn't put it down as a leisure activity, put it that way. It's an awkward one isn't it, I don't really know how to define it for me.

Sandy who is a self-employed health counsellor is still conscious of the 'problem' of enjoying her work. For her leisure is: *a time when you're not working? Whatever that means, I really enjoy my work. I have difficulty in coming to terms with 'work' as such I relate it to the process of working through emotions and that is all consuming but it isn't the same as 'work' which can be boring and tedious. She provides another way of looking at work: I've got it [my life] together reasonably well and a sense of myself. That's what I mean it's not so much as leisure but rather creative work, my creative work is often demanding.*

Returning to Study – 'leisure rather than work'

Alice regards going to Uni as leisure rather than work. Whereas Gloria wouldn't call going back to study, leisure, as some other people might.

Limits to leisure – parenting is 'not leisure'

Leisure is what happens at the rest of the time I'm not at work now, and I guess that's because I'm not parenting any more, I wouldn't say that

parenting was leisure but that took up a huge chunk of your non-work time. so now for me there's work and leisure. And that's the rest of my time.

Gloria

The lived experience of leisure

Although there were some reservations as to what the word leisure meant, most of the women were able to talk about their experience of leisure. In this context, enjoyment was often linked with their leisure experiences. There were a few exceptions which are included in the following sub-themes.

My very own time

No responsibilities – 'I can be really selfish now'

Many of these women are reassessing their roles and responsibilities with regard to their families. They are enjoying, as Mary explains:

... doing exactly what I want to do and not having anyone else relying on me. I can be really selfish now because I think I've done everything I can do for the kids I do feel a bit selfish sometimes, I can feel guilty, but I soon shake that off, so selfish in a positive sense.

I do see leisure as having freedom from a sense of responsibility. Leisure is when I can sit and read or walk just for me, and I'm not responsible for anyone else. Patria

I think that just sitting is when I feel really good ... nobody wants me to do anything for them, that it's my time and pleasure and leisure sort of goes together. Barb

Sarah enjoys playing games on her computer but she does have a slight feeling of guilt about it ... *that is very much a relaxing and recreational thing for me when I get into those, and allow myself that privilege to do it.*

A choice – 'doing what I want to do'

Mary, Merry, Josie and Andie were very clear about what leisure meant for them: ... *doing what I want to do, when I want to do it.*

I mean it's a very narrow circumscribed choice that I have but I have a choice and within that choice I can choose what I want to do. So I think well I'll go out into the garden or I'll play patience or paint silk or I'll go shopping or I'll clean the house, scrub the floors. Bet

I do very little now that I come back feeling drained about. If I did something, like joining the Bush-walking club and came back feeling totally drained, I'd just stop it. I don't go on doing it, what's the point of it? I'm there to enjoy it I'm not there to make work of it ... Gladys

I choose to do it because it gives me pleasure. Merry

A breathing space – 'opting out' and 'letting go'

I suppose that leisure is letting go. Gale

Well I have a saying, I'm opting out today, and I've done it a fair bit since Mum died ... I just closed my mind to all things I had to do and they were not going to exist and I read all day Monday. I suppose in one way you could say I was wrapping myself up in a cocoon and getting out of the reality of the grief ... and that's what just came into mind. Sarah

Integration – 'all aspects of the self'

I think it's when all aspects of the self are integrated the intellectual, the emotional, the spiritual and perhaps the physical and it's not consciously a drudge. Lynne

It sometimes has some spiritual aspect. Meryn

Making the most of opportunities available – 'essential to survival'

A more philosophical note from Rhoda, I'd say [leisure] was essential to survival to have a quality of survival, I see no reason for anyone to be lonely, miserable, not occupied and not have interesting things to do.

The unity of leisure

Not separated out – 'it's a whole tapestry, it's my life'

Many of the women related to this concept. Bet, who is retired said, All my life is my leisure. So when I wake up I think what will I do today that I want to do and that's how I spend my day ... No, it's a whole tapestry, it's my life.

Jenny, Lindy, Dee and Raven all talked about their lives being altogether and not separated out. As Lindy explained, Leisure and things that are enjoyable are just part of my whole life, not separate. Maybe it's because I don't work, as such, that I can see my life as a whole and not have enjoyable and leisure things at a particular time of the day/week or whatever. It can be just part of the day, any day, any time, not like finishing work and then doing 'whatever'.

Kate also regards her life as a whole, I see my playing as all part of me so I don't sort of say now is my leisure time. I'm my own boss and my time is my own and so I structure in the day all sorts of things.

Leisure is fun pleasurable – 'something you enjoy'

Most of the women regarded leisure as being *something you enjoy*. (Meryn) *Pleasure and leisure sort of goes together* according to Barb, and Mandy also puts these two concepts together, *leisure and pleasure are very much alike*. Lynne said that *it's when I'm thoroughly enjoying myself and at peace with myself and the world. It could be at any time and that is leisure, an absolute pleasure for me*. While Dee finds *it's pleasure, relaxing indulging*.

Two of the women include 'fun' as part of leisure. For Gale *it's having fun and having fun involves other people*, and Ngaire says *playing a game or doing yoga or Tai Chi, is fun*.

Two others had reservations about this aspect. Raven said *I don't necessarily equate enjoyment and leisure. There are some aspects of leisure that are distinctly not enjoyable as when, for example, I have a migraine I've been at leisure, I've spent two days in bed that's not enjoyment, but it's enforced leisure, and when I have leisure through illness I don't find it enjoyable at all*. Also Margie ponders, *I suppose enjoyable moments can crop up anywhere. I wouldn't simply describe that as leisure just because you enjoy it*.

Planning ahead – 'Doing something entirely different'

I think leisure involves doing something entirely different, something you had planned to do for quite a while. Ngaire

Re-creation – 'it's re-newing, and re-creative'

Another word that is used as being similar to leisure is recreation. This was mentioned by some of the women in the form of re-creation.

If I was going to put it in one word, I would say re-creation. It's something that I do that I enjoy that I feel relaxed in that gives me energy rather than drains me of energy. Yes its re-newing, and re-creating. Gladys

It's um ... it ... it doesn't necessarily have to cost anything and it's a form of re-creation ... over the years I've had a lot of re-creation by just being able to go out into the garden and just see it changing with the seasons. Just wandering and gathering a basket of flowers and watching the birds. I've become very bird conscious since we've been here, so just watching the birds ... very much a re-creation a re-birthing in a sense. Meryn

Sandy has a 'pure leisure' experience when she reads. As she said, *now reading I'd put down as being totally leisure. I consume books*.

Terry seems to get personal satisfaction and enjoyment from her work and the home that she has created. *If I go out the back and you whistle and you hear all the birds start whistling and everything, plus the fact that I built the*

cattery myself. We've done all the work ourselves, except the cement work. I'm handy and I can do things. I'd rather be out in the garden.

HEALTH AND MENOPAUSE

The women were asked, during their interview usually in the form of a question, 'What does the menopause mean to you and do you have any issues or concerns about menopause?' The responses demonstrated the whole range of views that midlife women have towards menopause including a rather contradictory response from Gloria, *you see menopause doesn't register with me really ... No, I don't think I'm going to have any problems, no I don't, but I do think about it.* And Lindy regards it as *a process that women go through that's very important in their lives for their whole wellbeing, it's a whole growth thing that you go through. And too many people want to suppress it with hormone therapy and I'm very adamant about that sort of thing, I'm very anti. Then I think if I was really suffering pretty badly I'd rush out and get something ...*

Despite menopause being a normal physiological process that all women experience, the medical profession has become increasingly involved in this stage of women's lives. Hysterectomies and Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) have become very popular as remedies and treatments for women's midlife symptoms. They have been hailed by many in the medical profession as the solution that will benefit most middle aged women. The participants in this study appear to have experienced both positive and negative reactions to this treatment and their stories provide graphic descriptions of the different ways women have been regarded by general practitioners and gynaecologists.

During the last few years there has been much more information available from Women's Health Centres and in the media about the importance of all women keeping physically active and the need to include calcium and other minerals in their diet. The women in this study seem to reflect this awareness and have taken steps to maintain their own good health as they grow older.

Many of the women have increased their understanding of the menopause by doing their own research and are making more informed decisions about what is best for their own needs. They are investigating non-medical alternatives choices and are finding they are not necessarily restricted to

traditional medical solutions. They sought knowledge in various ways for example, by recollecting their mother's experiences, sharing their own experiences with other women or getting information from books and Women's Health Centres.

The following table outlines the various themes and sub-themes that have evolved from the women's interviews.

Table Three

HEALTH AND MENOPAUSE THEMES

Growing old: the ageing body

Focus on the physical body

Appearance
Physical ability

Physiological aspects

Signs, symptoms and benefits – hot flushes
Loss of fertility
Fertility changes

Women's business

Sharing information

Attitudes towards menopause and the ageing body

A process that women go through

Acceptance of the symptoms

Sexuality

Being sexual
Losing out
Managing change

Emotional State

Being aware
Not preoccupied
Feeling fortunate

Losing control of the ageing process

The medicalisation of menopause: Treating the symptoms

Have a hysterectomy!
HRT confusion, solution or disaster
The doctor knows best?
Being in the powerless patient/doctor role
Not knowing

Ageing conditions

Fear of potentially debilitating/fatal conditions

Regaining control of the ageing process

Challenging/accepting the medical model

Concern about the effects of HRT
HRT is the answer

Our bodies ourselves

Taking notice of body experiences/feelings
Finding more information
Making own decisions for good health and wellbeing
Choosing other health practices
One woman's opinion

Growing old: The ageing body

Focus on the physical body

Many of the women expressed some opinion about growing old. Whether these were: concerns about the physical aspect, wrinkles and grey hair; noticing a *lack of energy*; a feeling that they were *not preoccupied with it*; or *just seeing it as being part of the ageing process, which it is*; and looking at the positive side, it being *a time of ripening*.

Appearance – 'shock' and 'fear' about changes

Only two women expressed concerns about the changes in their physical appearance.

There's certainly fear around the wrinkles and the grey hair and the loss of my physical things ... Kate

This was an enormous shock to me when I looked in the mirror. [after her father died and suddenly noticing grey hairs] Having felt that I would always accept grey hair quite easily and finding it was not quite as easy as I had thought. Lynne

Gloria was not so concerned about her physical appearance because ... *you see physically as a woman's body, I've never had the big breasts, I haven't been able to have a child I don't feel all that woman's stuff with my body, so whether the menopause is part of that...?*

Physical ability – 'the menopausal non-zest'

Several women expressed frustration and being angry because of their low energy, reduced strength and tiredness.

It's the menopausal non-zest ... I'm feeling a bit pissed off ... I haven't made allowances for it ... I hope it's not too big a blip. Winnie

I've slowed down, that's the most frustrating thing for me said Terry, and Jenny commented on ... *extreme tiredness*.

Another issue for Terry was the reduction in strength. *I'm quite strong but my hands don't 'hang on' ... Losing my strength to lift things, that's what makes me angry,*

Two of the women wondered if their physical symptoms were due to the menopause or something else. Gloria was more concerned with the fact that

she had Polio as a child and said, now *when I feel fatigued I think oh goodness, perhaps this is post-polio syndrome. I'm going to have to look into this and see what I can do food-wise, exercise-wise, yes, they are more the concerns. Gladys said a couple of times I've had some funny things going on with my legs, aching at night, and I've wondered ...*

Kate and Bet both expressed more positive views on their physical ability. *I've been reclaiming the joy of the physical which I love and my body is not at all stereotypical but I've completely, or almost, not been concerned with that having to look a certain way. I love the strength of my body, I am very strong and I love that and I've got a whole lot of these physical skills. Kate*

I've always been as strong as a horse and I've treated it like Boxer, in Animal Farm. So I've never been much troubled by my body. Bet

The connections between the physical and emotional are important too as Lindy said, *you can't separate them out.*

Physiological aspects

Signs, symptoms and benefits – hot flushes, 'a very useful weapon'

Gale has been having an irregular cycle for a while now and is wondering whether it is the menopause. She said, *I haven't had a regular period for two years now they've been irregular or infrequent and the cycle seems to have been broken and I've attributed that to stress, but it's been about two years so menopause comes to mind.*

Contrary to many other women's experiences, two of the participants have discovered the benefits of having hot flushes.

... the hot flushes I think have been great 'cos it's been in the winter, and I haven't felt cold the way I usually do and everyone is sitting shivering and I'm sitting thinking Oh I'm not cold. That's a good thing, but if I get them in the summer it may not be so good, I haven't let it get me down. I don't know whether I'm biased but I think these things you've got to look at with an open mind, I don't think Oh I've got a hot flush and I'm going to go mad and that, I just sort of sit there and let it waft over, and I often think that that's the way to go really. I mean you can't stop if you get a few cramps and things but you've had worse in your life so I think it's not going to last for long and hopefully I'm not going to die of it so I just think ... Mary

I used to get hot flushes when I was at school. The hot flushes were wonderful because I used to get this red bar and I used to use it to intimidate the kids. As soon as I got into a bit of a hassle with them I could feel this red bar, and they were so embarrassed about it and they would shuffle and look away, and I found it was a very useful weapon. Bet

Wanda found that although she did have some hot flushes earlier, now I seem to be going through more menopause symptoms afterwards, getting hormonal swings ... Lynne has been developing other aspects of herself and hasn't relied on the physical. I feel I'm in a very good position to accept the physiological changes that are happening because I've also developed other aspects of myself.

Loss of fertility – 'there is certainly grieving'

*Kate felt a certain amount of grief,
... and the loss, soon, of being able to have another child ... there is certainly grieving.*

*While Gloria did not have that connection with child-bearing,
... well I've had to deal with not having a child, but in some ways I don't have to see that [menopause] as the end of my child-bearing time you see because that ended ... so I don't have that connection.*

Fertility changes – 'I wasn't clucky any more'

At forty-five Sarah went through a very depressive stage when she realised she was not going to have a child, that was quite awful it affected all of us. Then God sent me Mum to look after and we were up lots of times in the night, and this particular night I'd been up six times already and it was only 3 a.m. and I was walking across the room and I got half-way across it and realised I wasn't 'clucky' any more. I started to laugh, because it had been such a serious business and so depressive and I realised I'm not 'clucky' any more this is wonderful. My light mood came back and I felt wonderful. Gary and I started laughing hysterically. That was a turning point.

Women's business

Sharing information – 'what my mother told me'

Daughters sometimes have 'women's business' handed down to them by their mothers. Several of the women mentioned their mothers' experience of menopause although in most cases this was only a rather vague memory.

I only know what my mother told me when she was going through it and I was only twenty at the time and didn't pay particular attention. But I remember she talked about crying and being depressed and I think she talked about hot flushes. Gale

My mother said to me when I was in England last year, all these patches and things, people making such a fuss about it. We just had to get through it the best we could. Helena

Two of the women did not have the benefit of their mother's experience. Meg commented, *I haven't really got a model because my Mum had a hysterectomy so I have no idea when to expect it and I've had terrible trouble with period pain ever since I was eighteen so just to get this over and done with would be a bit of a blessing.*

And Winnie's relationship with her mother did not include sharing intimate experiences. As she said, *I look at my mother, she's seventy-nine and I forget that somewhere in the middle of her life she must have gone through menopause, I wasn't around and didn't notice. My mum isn't an emotional sharer ...*

Attitudes towards menopause and the ageing body

They are not too concerned about the onset of age, and for those who have 'been through' menopause it did not appear to be a major upheaval. As Helena said, *I'm not preoccupied with it, and don't think much about it.*

A process that women go through

Acceptance of the symptoms – 'what's going to happen is going to happen'

... you can't separate that and say well this is really the problem ... It's a process that women go through that's very important in their lives for their whole wellbeing, it's a whole growth thing that you go through when you get to that time of your life ... Lindy

HRT, menopause, I just think what's going to happen is going to happen. Helena

...there are a lot of 'things' that aren't operating anymore and that's very much to do with my age. I'm enjoying being older. Kate

Part of the thing about coming out as a lesbian and being a lesbian that fear of ageing diminishes a lot. It doesn't feel like a diminishing functioning.

Gale

There are so many things that can be causing how you feel and it's too hard to isolate them sometimes. And so I think menopause is another one of those areas, but it's just trying to be a bit in tune with your body so you know that when you're feeling low you think, yes I'm feeling a bit low I must look after myself in this time. Gloria

Sexuality

Being sexual – 'I felt as though I was on my honeymoon!'

I was worried about it [menopause] and had heard all the myths about what would happen, my sex life would change, yes, my sex life changed all right, I felt as though I was on my honeymoon! Josie

Gloria said,... my latest thought is that I want to have one more torrid affair before I have a colestomy bag ... so I'm more concerned with that than menopause as an issue.

Losing out – 'the loss of being a sexual woman'

Kate was not so sure about the effect of menopause... there's certainly grief about losing out, the loss of being an attractive, or being seen as a sexual woman.

Managing changes – 'there are ways of dealing with those'

Jenny thought that her experience of being a lesbian would reduce the impact of any changes associated with menopause. If there are any problems sexually, I'm sure there are ways of dealing with those anyway ... because I choose to live with a woman and I think at this stage it will probably be with a woman of similar age and will have similar concerns so will understand, so that would be wonderful.

Emotional State

Being aware – 'I don't think menopause is easy'

It's just trying to be a bit in tune with your body so you know when you're feeling low, you think, yes I'm feeling a bit low I must look after myself in this time ... just being prepared to accept these times whether it's menopause, tiredness or whatever. Gloria

I don't think menopause is easy and I certainly got depressed, but nobody could talk about it. Now people talk about it quite freely, and it's much easier. Josie

I was having lots of mood changes, Jennifer

Not preoccupied – 'not a problem'

Whether they are post or peri-menopausal many of the women did not regard this stage of their lives as a big issue. *I didn't find menopause particularly ... well I don't know ... I'm a very unaware person in lots of ways ... I've never been much troubled by my body ... Bet*

Gloria and Meryn *don't think [they] will have any problems* and for Gladys, *menopause hasn't been a problem. Margie is having it and 'no worries'.* And Raven feels very positive about the issue, *I'm not on hormones, I still have my ovaries, and sexually active. What's this menopause thing exactly?*

Feeling fortunate – 'I've been pretty lucky'.

In one way I was very lucky because I didn't have any of the dreaded hot flushes, I just seem to go through it without any of those physiological symptoms ... Margie

I think I've been pretty lucky, I've had a few times when I haven't felt well, but I'm quite positive about it now. Mary

Apart from one episode I didn't notice menopause, it just happened.... I don't even remember when I stopped menstruating, it was of so little significance for me, I was very fortunate. Patria

Losing control of the ageing process

Women react in different ways when they notice the symptoms of menopause appearing. Many become concerned and because of society's attitude and the messages that abound towards the medical profession, 'if pain persists see your doctor' they pay a visit to their doctor for some help. In some cases the doctor's advice is very helpful, but in others the women experience feelings of anger, powerlessness and frustration with the way they are treated.

Medicalisation of menopause: treating the symptoms

Have a hysterectomy! – 'I wasn't given any options'

The number of women who have this operation as a solution to 'women's problems' is increasing. The women in this study are no exception. The four who spoke about this viewed their experience from different perspectives.

I thought by having a hysterectomy I would go through menopause very quickly ... I was put on hormone injections ... but I still went on for ten years.

Josy

I wasn't given any options with the hysterectomy, I saw a lady doctor who was called away so I saw her partner who said, you're a female, you're one of the sheep don't question me - he was one of the older type of doctors - he just said you've got to have a hysterectomy and that was that. I said OK ... not that I would have not had it but I would like to have known a bit about it. I came through the operation fine they didn't tell me about weight gain.

Patty

Right, I'm pre-menopausal anyway, although I had a hysterectomy in the early 80s, so I don't know whether ... it's not something I've ever thought about. Raven

I had to have a hysterectomy six years ago. I was flooding continually, twenty-two days and then off for five, I got so anaemic and weak. Mandy

HRT confusion, solution or disaster – 'a real con', or 'it mightn't make any difference'

Rhoda's experience illustrates the different approaches that the health professionals suggest for menopausal symptoms.

I did have a bit of flooding, but I had a curette and that settled it down OK. I had an examination with a gynaecologist and he advised HRT, couldn't guarantee no periods and I said I'm not doing that again. So didn't take that and recently the doctor who is an acupuncturist suggested I take it for osteoporosis and he only gave me the oestrogen that I took for three months then went to the women's clinic for a smear and she had hysterics and said you should be taking this other hormone, took it and had this gigantic flood at sixty-two. So she [the doctor] had also given me a note to have hip and spine bone density tests and the result of this was at this point you are OK with regards to the role model who is a pre-pubescent, we advise you to have the tests again in two years time and take it from there.

These other women gave different examples of their experience with HRT. *I had a very strong conviction that this HRT business was a real 'con' ... I get so cross when I hear people who have written books on this being interviewed on radio and TV saying oh you must go on to HRT oooh, I recognise that some people need to ... what made me angry was that this gynaecologist said to me, oh you know that 80% need HRT ...* Meryn

... too many people want to suppress it with hormone therapy and I'm very adamant about that sort of thing, I'm very anti. Then I think if I was really suffering pretty badly I'd rush out and get something, I don't know ... Lindy

Well at forty-three I had some problems and they gave me some hormones that stopped it, then I haemorrhaged and then it was all right again. Wanda

I can't actually have HRT because of my heart and I have thromboses all the time which was caused by being on The Pill in the 60s. I think I would really question it if I did have the option. Raven

HRT was mentioned [by her daughter who is a GP] but I'm not a tablet medication person ... and it mightn't make any difference. Gladys

The doctor knows best? – 'I trust her'

The responses regarding the doctor's role in menopause issues were mostly *I trust her* and *oh well he's a doctor and he knows best*. Some of the women were not prepared to take the doctor's advice without considering other alternatives.

... And I monitored myself fairly well and at one stage about eighteen months ago I had the need to go to the doctor, I don't go very often because I'm a reasonably healthy person. And she said oh you need a curette, and so I went and had one. She referred me to a gynaecologist up in the day clinic at the hospital and he was very keen for me to go on HRT. Meryn

My doctor said you are going on to the HRT programme because it is so beneficial for bone and heart problems. And I thought, oh dear, I don't know whether I'd go along with that. But she's a very good doctor and I trust her, so if she thinks it's the right thing to do I think I will go along with it.

Helena

I was having lots of mood changes, extreme tiredness or having late or early periods and I couldn't understand what was going on. And when I went to the doctor she said you're too young to be going through menopause, but obviously your hormones are beginning to jump around ... I chose to take progesterone for two months and it was wonderful all the symptoms disappeared. Jenny

... so I went to my family doctor and he said 'well Patty you're at that age you're just going to have to put up with it'. And I thought oh well he's a doctor and he knows best. But things were so bad, I was tired I couldn't even walk to the letter-box without having to have a rest. And I thought this is awful, what's the use of living, not that suicide ever crossed my mind, but I did wonder what was the use of living. Patty

... and the doctors tried to talk me into taking hormones. Wanda

Being in the powerless patient/doctor role – 'I was really mad with myself'

Several women expressed anger at their gynaecologists 'pushing' HRT and began to question their submissive role in the presence of these doctors.

I found it really interesting when I went to him I dropped into my patient-doctor role, very timorous, and I walked out and thought to myself what on earth am I doing. He had convinced me to go on to HRT, so I did for about three weeks and I was so angry with myself. I thought bugger this Meryn so I stopped and I started bleeding straight away I got angrier! Meryn

I was really mad with myself, because I'd read all about it and I went to the doctor and he said you must go on this because you could have heart failure and kidneys, and so I sort of got talked in to it and I was really unwell and thought this was ridiculous and I was frightened to stop it. Mary

... and the thing that bugged me most was one said, oh they'll make me be younger, and I thought that's sexist, and that makes me all the more determined that I'm not going to have them. But I don't really want them, Wanda

Not knowing – 'there are a lot of things that I could have done'

Meg expressed anger at her lack of information about what she could do to decrease the risk of osteoporosis and dementia.

... and I'm hoping I can cope with menopause without drugs, I don't like the idea of HRT. And I feel a bit angry that I didn't know about it before because there are a lot of things I could have done, like taking more calcium before I was thirty-five ... I also worry a bit about aluminium and Alzheimer's and think about all those years I put aluminium under my armpits. That makes me angry, that's my future going that I didn't know about, I wouldn't have wasted it if I had known. Meg

Ageing Conditions

Fear of potentially debilitating/fatal conditions – 'a breakdown of organs'

The medical research has suggested that there is an increase of osteoporosis, heart and circulation problems after menopause. This was a concern for three of the women.

I suspected I had osteoporosis ... went for a bone density reading and found that I didn't in fact have osteo, but I started HRT straight away. Barbara

Yes and heart, and you think to yourself well I don't want to die of heart failure or anything and they mention a breakdown of organs ... which sort of worries you doesn't it? ... Yes that's what he says it stops breakdown of organs and you can't see your organs so you can't see any breaking down so you don't know, yeah. Mary

I had an early menopause and I am concerned about osteoporosis, I'm not on HRT. Sandy

Regaining control of the ageing process

Several of the women, after various experiences and procedures with the medical profession, decided to regain control of their bodies and rejected the hormone therapy, or made their own decision to stay on it, and/or found alternative methods to manage the symptoms.

Challenging the medical model

Concern about the effects of HRT – 'I didn't really want to go on HRT', 'it must have been a mad moment'

Three women, after experiencing the side effects of HRT decided to stop taking it.

I did think about going on hormone therapy, and I did for a while, and then I thought [after realising she would continue to bleed] I'm not going to go through this all again, it's stupid, so why am I going back? Bet.

Yes, It was interesting to work my way through taking the HRT. I'm not sure why I agreed to take it, it must have been a mad moment. Rhoda

Meryn started taking HRT and got really angry when she started bleeding again, so I sat down and wrote out a whole lot of questions, and a whole lot of statements I wanted to make and I went back to him and 'stood up' and made my case. And I'd done more reading as well probably more than he had done, he was a brash young man and was probably taken aback by me but I told him I didn't really want to go on HRT and would get back to him if I needed to and I left. So I stopped ... we don't talk about gynaecologists these days ... I don't need it.

HRT is the answer – 'I'll be on it for ever'

Four other women regarded HRT as the answer for them.

I intend to take HRT ... till the day I die ... at the moment it's contraception but really it's only a difference in dosage ... I presume hot flushes will be reduced, and anyway I'm a bit flushy anyway. Dee.

Some of that is because I'm on Hormonal Replacement Therapy ... I know I had moods, especially from twelve onwards that were uncontrollable, and I would lose my temper so easily. Since I've been on HRT those mood swings have gone Yes it's only a year since I've been on it. Sarah

Huh, huh, oh yes I had to take the hormone tablets from when I was thirty-nine, I had to take oestrogen. Just recently I've been having some really heavy flushes. I suppose you get it about once a month. Terry

Patty did her own research and found her own solution – HRT for ever.

In the end I took myself off to Queen Vic [women's hospital] and had a curette and that didn't do any good ... I was reading through the Women's Weekly and it said, Are hormones your problem? and I read it and I thought what rot and then I thought hang-on. So I rang the numbers given, and they said, oh yes you need hormone replacement therapy. So out I went and that stacked on more weight, but within twenty-four hours I had the ladder out washing the ceilings. And I hadn't done anything like that for four years. The doctor did say that in forty-eight hours you'll feel a new woman but it only took twenty-four.... Whether my time is up for that or not I only know that over the last two months I've felt tremendous. Yes and I'll be on it for ever.

Our bodies ourselves

Taking notice of body experiences/feelings – 'I tend to be more reflective'

These four women have worked out their own ways of managing changes in their bodies. Sarah has *a personal theory about mood swings they will be alleviated by certain foods and that will help with the body chemistry, or helping bodily hormones level out.*

Mary has *learnt something in my ageing years. If I don't feel too good one day I say I'm not doing anything today and I sit and do reading and letter writing and things and you feel good the next day. I think that's been my fault all my life, fighting things. And Wanda had some advice from an eighty-five year old lady who told her you're going to feel all these funny things and won't know what they are, but they'll gradually go. And they did for a while, but when I get anxious I get emotional and I know I'll be OK I'm not going off my head.*

Winnie recognises *the value of having involuntary time of reflection and with-drawing a bit and maybe grieving for loss. I mean I know my life has been changing through my 40s, I tend to be more reflective and less active in terms of being activist. I don't rush off and become involved, and go on marches and things. So I have been more inward looking and I think menopause probably obliges you to do that, I don't want to miss out on that experience.*

Finding more information – 'people talk about it quite freely [now]'

Some of the women found talking with friends was useful. The women's health centres and services also provide another source of information.

... and having these friends of mine who are older than me, telling me of their experiences. Helena

But after sitting around talking [with a group of women] I felt so much better that it was all part of that, and it's not a great big thing that's going to rob me of anything. Jenny

Now people talk about it quite freely, and it's much easier. Josy

... so I went to the Women's Health Centre which I should have gone to in the first place. Apart from going against the other doctor she couldn't see why I wanted all this. And she said I'm a late starter and your body's

probably full of oestrogen so come off it and I haven't looked back since. So that was silly of me going on it really. Mary

Reading and attending workshops and classes have enabled the following women to increase their knowledge and make their own decisions about menopause.

And since then I've read Germaine Greer [The Change], good old 'Germs', [a term of endearment given to Germaine by many Australian feminists] have you read her book? yes well her stance is so different, certainly not a conventional stance at all. Bet

That's [the menopause experience] been a really interesting aspect of my life. I think in the back of my mind I had some very strong views about it and did a lot of reading. I got very involved with discussions when we were doing women and health at women's studies. Meryn

Well, just before I turned forty I did a workshop at the Women's Health Centre up here, on the menopause, 'cos I didn't know anything much about it. At least I've got the facts now and I've read a bit more about it. Meg

Making own decisions for good health and wellbeing – 'I think I'm much healthier'

Yes, well I'm going to make those decisions for myself, and see how I go. I'm very opposed to using doctors or mainstream drugs, I just don't and I'm not a drug taker or antibiotics, or whatever. So the idea of going and getting myself HRT goes against my way of doing things, but I also want to be open-minded about it. I don't want to be just ideologically correct if there's something that will advantage me and not disadvantage me, but I can't see what it is yet. ... I haven't found anyone I can really trust to do that with.

Winnie

Several women are observing *good health practices* by keeping active, eating well and having screening tests regularly.

I guess since I've been by myself I've paid a fair bit of attention to diet, I've certainly had more exercise than I'd ever had at any period in my life. I think I'm much healthier. Gladys

[After a crisis in her life when she was peri-menopausal] *I was lucky to survive that ... I had a lot of tests medically and I now keep those up regularly as well as basic good health practices. Margie*

I think I'll prepare myself, I do exercise, I'm in good health, I've got strong bones ... I do quite a lot of walking, with the dog to help. I keep regularly active. Meg

Choosing other health practices – 'reading about other natural therapies'

Two women consulted a naturopath as an alternative to medical advice. Winnie went to see one *about my bleeding* and Gale was pleased with her visit and said *I think I'll keep going to see her.*

The power of positive thinking works for Mandy and *means I'll probably be all right. I finally got an appointment with this doctor who was a menopause specialist, and she said I probably wouldn't have any trouble since I was doing exercise and losing weight so the power of positive thinking.*

One woman's opinion – 'no woman needs to be on HRT'

I did my project on this, and found that the HRT therapy is pushed by the people who make the pill and they work under the supposition that if you've been taking the pill since you were sixteen you might as well keep doing it because you're in the habit. It will not put back the bone you have lost. It will help you not lose more but there is also the risk of cancer, and this needs to be carefully looked at and doctors are given specific information about who they give this to and they need to be fully aware of the patient's background for fear of litigation. The thing that will put back bone is calcium and weight-bearing exercises not swimming, and eating fish three times a week so really speaking, unless there's a very obvious need, no woman needs to be on HRT. Many women are taking it and they don't know why they're taking it, they didn't query it because the doctor said. I've never been one who does things blindly, I want to know why, in layman's terms, how I'm going to benefit how long lasting will the benefit be, and why really should I do this. Rhoda

SUMMARY

These midlife women demonstrate the multi-faceted realities and also the contradictions that their experiences have taught them about the concept of leisure as well as menopause. Their perceptions of what leisure means to them seems to encompass the whole range of current understanding and 'slip' between various theoretical perspectives. Further discussion on this is given in Chapter Nine. Their experience, or awareness of menopause also appears to have been affected by the 'menopause industry' (Coney 1991) which has become widespread in Australia. Despite this 'campaign' most of the women who have experienced menopause regard it as a 'marker' of midlife but do not appear to be duly concerned about the possibility of any long term effects to their health and wellbeing.

The next chapter provides the findings on enjoyment and the flow concept. By asking the women about their enjoyable experiences this research has endeavoured to utilise a concept that cuts across the traditional segmented approach to people's lives. This method has also attempted to discover whether these midlife women's lives follow the traditional negative stereotypes frequently alluded to in our society.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS PART 2

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ENJOYMENT AND FLOW

INTRODUCTION

The women in the study, when asked to "think back to a time when you were really enjoying yourself and tell me about it", could all describe an experience or an activity that they enjoyed. These descriptions showed the tremendous richness and variety of their individual experiences when they were enjoying themselves. Their accounts ranged from expeditions of several days to particular events and occasions of a shorter duration. The women's delight in talking about these times and the pleasures they experienced was evident in their facial expressions and general body language. As the women remembered the details they appeared to relive their experiences and became more animated and involved in the topic of the interview.

The over-riding common theme, related to their descriptions of enjoyable experiences, was 'taking delight or pleasure in what I am doing'. This appears to indicate that they can all identify with the sensation of enjoyment but each woman has her own particular understanding, meaning and interpretation of her various experiences. The themes, therefore, do not necessarily describe the essence of enjoyment, as such, but they reflect various common meanings that some/most/all of the women articulated in their descriptions which show how enjoyment is revealed in the experiences of the women in the study.

Because Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1988, 1990) notion of flow is a very coherent account in the literature of enjoyment, I chose to use this in order to further extend the women's descriptions of enjoyable experiences. My primary interest was the women's lifeworld and by introducing flow I imposed another dimension into these descriptions which may not have arisen in a less structured interview. Although flow has some aspects of universality such as being totally involved and unaware of time, it also needs to be viewed from a position which takes account of individual differences. Nevertheless the women's descriptions of their experience of enjoyment would appear to encompass some of the aspects of flow and

demonstrate there is a close relation between the concepts of enjoyment and 'going with the flow'.

ENJOYMENT

How do these women want to live their lives and experience enjoyment? Whether the experience of enjoyment is seen as involving blocks of time when they specifically go out and do something that is enjoyable and pleasurable, or whether it is incorporated into an ongoing lived experience is really up to the individual. It commonly entails being free of being dictated to by the demands and needs of others.

The range of activities described as being enjoyable was wide and they were not confined by the traditional concepts of leisure. These experiences could be in everyday life, as in gardening:

I suppose when I get out in the garden time and everything goes. I think that's the only time when time and reality get right away, it's doing something you enjoy – Merry;

reading:

... that's a classic for me, I mean I actually lose control sometimes when I'm reading, so that I push everything forward, my life doesn't start again until I've got to the end of the book – Winnie;

walking:

When I walk along the beach I feel really there, because there's the smell and a lovely sunset. And nothing else matters, there's nothing else bothering me and there's just me and the sea – Barb;

doing the ironing:

I go miles away into a dream and do my dream ... I put records on that I like full blast and iron away and I don't hear them 'cos I'm miles away until the record's finished and I've almost finished the ironing ... so I must lose myself then completely – Mary;

being with family members and friends:

The times when I've experienced it have been with the Rainbow Circle group ... and a couple of times when a friend and I have gone away on a holiday together, a walking holiday – Meryn;

or learning new things:

Yes, I felt that this year in my study. I've really been enjoying this ... Yesterday I sat down and wrote six pages; it just sort of flowed, and I really felt good. There was no hesitancy, or feeling that I wasn't sure. Everything went so well – Barb.

In other words any activity which provides the catalyst or trigger to enable the women to have an experience that is enjoyable. Structured activities, for example sport, were rarely mentioned by the women. The setting may vary for example being involved in a social environment where personal skills

may include listening, attentiveness and the ability to discuss and share experiences as well as be open to others. Alternatively, some women spoke about the joy of being on their own away from the home and in an environment which 'restores a sense of themselves'. Another situation may involve their physical ability, where strength, skills, stamina and possibly leadership skills are needed. A further example is when creativity and a sense of humour ensure an enjoyable experience.

The following table provides an outline of the various themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the participants' descriptions of their enjoyable experiences. Each theme is accompanied by relevant quotations, in the women's own words, from the transcripts. These themes encompass modes of enjoyment as well as alternative areas of level of experience in which enjoyment may appear. They also incorporate the many and varied components which go together to make an experience enjoyable. These components are not necessarily present for all the participants in all their enjoyable experiences, nevertheless there are many that are common.

Table Four

ENJOYMENT THEMES

The lived body

A sense of physical wellbeing

Being physical

Feeling strong

Physically relaxing

Mental and emotional wellbeing

Restoring and healing

Meeting spiritual needs

Being free and happy

A sensory experience

Concerned with self

Self-awareness

Learning

Expanding own boundaries

Time and space

Guilt and selfishness

In relationship(s) with others

Delight in new roles

Women friends

Having concern for others

Intellectual stimulation

Being self indulgent

Fun

A sense of achievement

Learning

New skills

Being challenged

Feeling confident

Being powerful/influential

Fulfilment

Being successful

The lived body

During the last two decades there has been an increased awareness of the physical body. Physical fitness has become big business and media attention has been focused on the importance of maintaining regular physical activity to achieve good health. Physical activity is not necessarily regarded as enjoyable. Many people, for various reasons, experience difficulty in actually engaging in some form of sport, physical recreation or exercise. These difficulties may include: fear of falling, physical and mental disability, lack of confidence and self-consciousness. Women in particular have expressed apprehension and self-consciousness about being involved in physical activity where they are being observed by others. However most of the women in this study do enjoy physical activity.

A large number of the women described some form of physical activity as enjoyable. They are physically active in many different ways, on their own or with others, in different environments, but they *do do it*. There appears to be an awareness either conscious or unconscious amongst most of these women that physical movement will 'trigger' feelings of enjoyment. The decision to go on an expedition, for example bush-walking or canoeing, or do some form of physical activity will therefore not only provide the opportunity to exercise the body in various ways and to different intensities but will also have the potential to provide an enjoyable experience.

Some of the women found that a particular experience will evoke a non-bodily sense of enjoyment which can be independent of any particular activity. The knowledge that a certain experience will provide a sense of pleasure and wellbeing may lead them to continue to do this activity in order to recapture the sensation.

A sense of physical wellbeing

Being physical – 'I like anything physical'

Sport has always made Mary 'feel happy', as she said, *I think just because I'm active and outside, preferably to inside. My body feels good, especially when outside, whether it's raining or snowing, or sunny as long as I'm outside I'm enjoying it.* Kate loves stretching her physical limits. After playing tennis with her brother for half an hour she was *dripping with sweat and I got quite exhausted ... but I've got good memories of being physical.* Jenny has always been physically active and said *I enjoy anything physical.*

One of the women, Gale, enjoys working out in her home gym, *regular exercise keeps me feeling fit and feeling grounded and I feel good in myself when I'm exercising ...* Dee likes anything physical but she would *much rather play sport than do aerobics*. While Sandy needs to do a lot of exercise *and the more I do the better I feel and if I don't exercise for a week or so I get really jittery*. Gladys said *I really enjoy folk-dancing ... we do all sorts of dancing and that's really enjoyable*.

I'm a physically active person by nature. I love water, water fascinates me and that's why canoeing appeals to me so much, so it just put all those things together. Margie

Walking, arose often as the occasion for enjoyment. Many of them walk alone, but not always, some enjoy walking with others as well, *but that is different*. The love of walking *for miles and miles and miles* alone, and getting 'lost' in the activity, not realising how far and how long they have been walking was an enjoyable experience described by several women.

Barb, Gladys and Sandy walk alone either *up the river* or *for miles along the Adelaide beaches*. Walking gives Mary pleasure now that *I've had to slow down because of an arm injury, and I'm not so active with other sports ... so I just walk now and I enjoy the walking*. She still climbs hills and loves it. And Gladys also likes climbing and said *I go up and climb Black Hill at least once a month and sometimes every week to keep my climbing up and I find that gets me back into kilter*. Now that the responsibility for her Mum has gone Sara *enjoy walks, I love going for a long walk and I'm looking forward to doing more of that*.

Raven enjoys company and likes *walking the dog in the sunshine and I don't mind in the rain either*. Marina also enjoys casual walking but does not do enough of that and her dog is lazy so *there is not an opportunity for walking with her*.

Swimming, another rhythmical activity, was not mentioned as much as walking, but for two women it was very enjoyable. While on a holiday in Bali and after a day of indulging herself Sandy would then swim *forty or fifty laps as the sun was going down and feeling physically absolutely buzzing*. Margie has always liked swimming, being in, on or near water is *important to my feeling of wellbeing*.

Feeling strong – 'to feel the pull of my body against the water'

Two women enjoyed the physicality of their bodies when they went canoeing. Gloria said *I was able to use my body that I like for its strength and its coordination and to use it with as much strength as I like or as little strength as I like and just to feel the pull of my body against the water, like to me it's a non-competitive way to feel the strength and control of your body.*

Winnie found canoeing, combined *physical exertion, that sense of effort, and it was an effort, I wasn't very fit. I went to a gym for a bit to get suddenly fit and I overdid it a bit and my triceps were really painful and of course in canoeing you're using your triceps a lot ... so I was weary but that was fine, it was within my limits and it's good to be pushed and it's only something like that, that does that, I don't push myself very much.*

While Merry takes great pleasure in a physical work-out, *stretching those muscles and feeling they were stretching.*

Physically relaxing – 'let our hair down'

Meryn talked about a weekend away with a group of women, *we have a great time up there, and we just totally relax and let our hair down.*

Sandy's time in Bali provided her with the complete and totally relaxed enjoyable holiday experience. She spent her days swimming, walking, doing yoga, having massages and totally indulging herself. *I would get up with the sun as I always do, at about half past five the sun would come up and I could see it from my bed, and I'd get up and go out on the balcony and do my yoga and meditation and then I'd walk an hour down the beach to where I'd have breakfast. And then after breakfast I'd have a swim and then I'd go and have a massage on the beach.*

Mental and emotional wellbeing

Restoring and healing – 'it gives me peace of mind'

There was a need to walk in different environments, either along the beach for Barb *I love walking, especially along the beach, it gives me peace of mind,* or amongst trees for Sarah *I have a great affinity with trees, to restore a sense of themselves.*

Two women talked about the urgent need to get out and walk. For Merry, occasionally walking in the Botanic Gardens is important, *I've got to walk through and just sit there for a half an hour or an hour or just have a*

wander through, so it just restores me. And Patty sometimes wakes up and feels *I've just got to get out of this house ... I just walk [in a nearby recreation park] I don't push myself, I just walk and think how beautiful it is up there, and after a while I just turn around and come home ... it restores my sense of self.*

Gladys found that walking was *very healing when she was hurting badly* and Jenny still walks in the park down the end of the road, whether she's happy or unhappy. *When I'm unhappy it's very good therapy. I talk to the trees and sort out my problems with the trees and the birds and whoever else is there. And even when I'm happy it's good, I still enjoy walking.*

Meeting spiritual needs – 'just warms my soul and spirit'

Some of the enjoyable experiences described by the women included a form of meditation. Gloria, when speaking about a canoe trip, said *there were very few other people, so the setting was something that just warms my soul and my spirit.* And Margie said about swimming, *I always feel very much at peace and happy, provided the water is warm enough, it is a sort of meditative experience.*

Merry gets a lot of pleasure looking at sunsets. *We get some lovely sunsets from where I am we look out to the west, over the Gulf and it's just so delightful and I can just sit there and think isn't this wonderful and I feel quite overcome with the beauty of it and that's a sort of momentary pleasure.* Gladys enjoys folk-dancing and says, *I think the music has a lot to do with it it has got quite a spiritual component ... We very often end up with a quite meditative section at the end ... we do a lot of circle dances and there are a lot of elements of sacred dances, she doesn't push that, but there is an element of that there ... so I think there are a lot of needs met there in a way.*

Well we walk every morning in the Parklands with the dog. And there are lots of things there to watch growing up, all the trees that have been planted recently. So there's plenty of everyday chances to get that sense [of being part of a bigger world]. Patria

At the end of her interview Winnie remembered the moon-light baths. *It's a ritual and it's pleasurable but it's a discipline as well, it's like going to yoga every week, I really put that as a high priority like yoga ... and once a month I have the bath as a ritual, it's like celebrating the new moon, it is pleasure*

but I don't do it as an indulgence ... it forces me to take time-out, reflect and because it's honouring something in nature, it's cyclical, it's like the female it's the feminine principle I'm honouring, it's non-Christian, it's pagan in that sense, so it's honouring an ancient spirituality. It's my one outward manifestation of an inward spirituality that I don't show or talk about. I can make light of the full moon bath but that's basically what it's tapping into and what it's expressing, and it is important, and I've been doing that for years now.

Being free and happy – 'just generally feeling good about life'

When I'm exercising ... I get a feeling and a sense of freedom, just free. Gale

Lindy does not have to be doing any particular activity for enjoyment, some days I just wake up happy and bouncing along and not really knowing why and just generally feeling good about life when things are going well and I feel like things are moving. I also feel quite happy.

Patty, who is keen on flying, took her eldest grandchild, who is also into aircraft, on an unforgettable trip, we've been up in jets and helicopters and water planes and I said you've never flown until you've been in a DC3. I thought I was going to burst I was so happy.

Ngairé appeared to get a sense of freedom and enjoyment when she said, well I suppose one of my greatest enjoyments is to shut up the house and walk away.

A sensory experience – 'the sense of touch' and 'smell or the sounds'

I do enjoy massage, the sense of touch, and my partner and I do massage each other. Lynne

Merry, when gardening can just have a sensory experience as well. On days like today that is slightly warm and sunny, it is just an absolute delight digging your hands in the soil and feeling a bit of warmth on your skin and having the pleasure of seeing all the plants you have nurtured from very little babes,

Walking in the bush restores a sense of wellbeing for Sarah, I don't know whether it's the smells, or the sounds, and now with my hearing aids I can hear the birds. So it's a real thrill every time I hear birds.

If I had to choose one thing it would be the image of being under an eiderdown on a cold and drizzly day with a feast of books. Or just one good book, that's my idea of heaven. Winnie

Concerned with Self

Many women who marry and have children find it difficult to separate out their own needs and wants from those of the family. When they do manage to take time for themselves these women often find it difficult not to feel guilty. The women in this study who are now or have been in this situation have, in most cases, begun to work out what they really want as independent people and overcome these feelings of guilt. Midlife can be regarded as a new stage in their lives where there is the opportunity to explore and reassess their situation and make decisions for future directions. It would appear that these women are actively seeking out ways and opportunities to learn more about themselves and have enjoyable and meaningful experiences. The findings would also indicate that midlife is a liberating experience for many women.

Self-awareness

Learning – 'I've learnt a lot about myself'

Jenny has been learning about astrology. *I find that through astrology and my own star signs I've learnt a lot about myself as well as trying to weed out some of the more negative parts and build on the positive. That's been really good, I enjoy that.* Meryn found since she's got older *I've become more self-centred and do things I want to do for myself, and feel good about that, and that's been great.*

Patty learns from everything and said *I get a buzz out of life I love meeting people talk about anything, and everything is interesting.* And Gale has discovered that *when I'm doing things on my own the feeling isn't fun it's satisfaction, or self-actualisation, like writing is very much a self-actualisation experience.* Andie has found out what she enjoys when travelling, *I enjoy travelling. I was on my own during the trip around, I don't know whether I enjoy most the preparation or the journey itself or getting there but I just like the whole thing – you do [feel like you're in a different space] because you don't worry about housekeeping, and cooking and seeing new things all the time that's very enjoyable.*

Expanding own boundaries – 'not in control necessarily'

Winnie enjoys working with her bees. *But they give me a sense of fear as well, because I hate being stung so there's always this tenterhook feeling working with bees. But I like that sense that I'm not in control necessarily of them, I'm working with them or they allow me to work with them ... so I suppose it's like something else that has a life of its own that I can be part of, like riding a horse is the same thing, you're not in total control of a horse as you are with a car.*

Time and space – 'on my own'

Alice has worked out ways to be on her own and chooses to stay at home when her husband goes out bush. *So it works out quite well. So that's the way I get my own space. She also snatches periods of enjoyment while doing other things for example, I think when I'm in the shower, but I need a tape-recorder in there 'cos I forget when I come out ... (laughter).*

On my own there are lots of things that I really enjoy, sometimes it's just feelings of solitude. Gale

Gloria uses the two words pleasure and leisure interchangeably when she talks about enjoyment but is quite definite about *what I do mainly for pleasure, the time by myself is ... and whether that's just reading or pottering, that's a large part of my leisure, that's important there has to be a certain amount of that ... and I need it always interspersed with everything else.*

Guilt and selfishness – 'one is actually not supposed to enjoy things'

I think until quite recently I would have said that throughout my life I've considered enjoyment, well one is actually not supposed to enjoy things one is supposed to get on and do and therefore there is a slight feeling of guilt if you're actually enjoying something, it connotes selfishness. Raven

I do quite a lot of reading, but I do still have difficulty sitting down during the day and reading, 'cos, I get that little voice saying I should be doing the housework or I should be doing that ... Meryn

I do a lot of things with my grandchildren, things that I was restricted by society from doing when I was younger. I was very much raised to the idea of, whatever will the neighbours think? Patty

In relationship(s) with others

Delight in new roles – 'I enjoy my grandchildren'

Several women spoke about how they enjoy spending time with their grandchildren. Gladys feels she is *a bit like the usual grandmother, I'm happy to see them, and I'm happy to see them go ... I enjoy spending the time with them that I wouldn't have done with my own children.* And Josie said *I enjoy my grandchildren, I absolutely live for them. They're all in Adelaide. I have a favourite.*

My own children used to come bush-walking with me, there used to be a lot of complaints from a few of them. So now my grandchildren come and that's something else I enjoy. Patty

Patria remembered another experience she enjoys, *I haven't said how much pleasure it gives me to be with my grandchildren, and in a sense that's not leisure because you're frequently responsible. It's different from being totally free to do what I like, but it is one of the things that give me most pleasure. Teaching a child to sew, getting one of them involved with you in the garden, going for a walk with the dog and a child.*

Rhoda also enjoys her time with her grandchildren. *It's rather lovely, my eldest grand-daughter will ring me and say Grandma, I need to speak to somebody and I can't talk to Mummy or Daddy they don't understand. And it gives you the wonderful feeling and she'll babble on.*

As an older woman with a group of young people on a canoeing expedition, Margie *enjoyed the company of these young people, it was lovely to get to know them, the whole thing enthused me.*

Women friends – 'Talking and sharing'

Lynne described an experience at a women's studies camp. *We were all very warm and cosy inside, but we could see the elements outside. We had beautiful music playing, everyone was feeling mellow with the bulk of the work for the year completed and we were enjoying one another and each other's company.*

Lindy could not think of a particular occasion that she enjoys but *I always enjoy being with women friends, talking and sharing and that sort of thing.* And Mary had a similar experience with women friends from university *I think it's because we usually have a good laugh and I'm happy and I'm sharing it, the enjoyment.*

Having concern for others – 'I've always enjoyed doing things for other people'

Three of the women spoke of enjoying their involvement with various community organisations. Josie said, *I've got to be careful, I suppose, that I don't let the organisations I belong to become my recreation. I go to a lot of meetings it does become your life, so I need to separate from these. I enjoy it, I enjoy people and have had a lot of encouragement from my family.*

And Margie commented that *I'm really enjoying my involvement in St John and [it is] giving me a feeling of being some use in the community, it's been very good for me in the social sense.* Sarah said *I very much enjoy everything I do for the [Baha'i] Faith, sometimes I might get a bit fed up with it, doing the filing or something, but I'm enjoying it still.*

Ngairé spoke about *the wonderful times in my life have always related to my times with other people. I've always enjoyed doing things for other people. I enjoyed cleaning up and getting things done ... [and] doing things with people. I've had such fun working with these lone parents. I always find that when I've finished with them I feel happy because they're happy too.*

Intellectual stimulation – 'the most fun ... having an intellectual discussion'

This was an enjoyable aspect of several women's lives, whether this is in a formal sense at an educational institution or being involved in an interesting discussion.

As Alice said *I always wanted to go to Uni ever since I left school ... I really enjoy meeting people up at Uni, after lectures or before ... that's probably the most fun I have these days, because we all sit there and have an intellectual discussion ...* Bet enjoys sharing ideas with others and *talking 'cos I don't do it much now so that's why I'm terribly loquacious when it happens. If someone lowers the boom of the dam and whoosh, out comes all this gush! I'm not much of a small talker ... but laying down the law – yes, telling people what – yes, investigating ideas, all those things ... that is what gives her a lot of pleasure.*

I've actually enjoyed the discipline of study, I'm not doing it at the moment, but to be actually stretched and pushed into thinking about things I wouldn't normally come across. There's a pleasure in that, that is a particular pleasure, an intellectual pleasure. Winnie

Wanda enjoys reading, *I love Simone de Beauvoir, I find her a fascinating lady, I don't know whether I like her morals, but she's fascinating. Her stamina to do things and the way she got them done, is just great.*

Being self-indulgent – 'having a lover'

Dee was the only woman to talk about her intimate relationship. She said, *I enjoy having a lover. So love makes the world go round I think it's gorgeous I think I could be addicted to it ... I love my bed so cosy mmm and nice and comfortable and self-indulgent mmm.*

Fun – 'women are so good at having fun'

Fun is not a word that is used by many of the women but the following women did mention it in relation to enjoyable times. Margie edits the family newsletter *and it has been the greatest fun you can possibly imagine.* Meg realised, when speaking about enjoyable activities, that she sees fun in a different way now she is older. *They're fun, but it's not that space of fun that I referred to back in the past. I guess I have this responsibility that I may have to put this down and do something else.*

Winnie talked about the company of women and fun ... *I mean women are so good at having fun ... and each time I go off with a group of women it reminds me of childhood of play ... being really playful, and everything is turned into humour.*

The experience of learning to canoe provided Patty with a fun-time *we did have a lot of fun.* And Sandy said, about her trip to Bali, *that was fun, it was absolutely luxury and marvellous it was the best \$2,000 I have spent in my life, I think.*

A sense of achievement

As part of their exploration of midlife, some of these women have discovered that expanding and developing their knowledge and skills can be enjoyable. This sometimes involves taking risks and feeling confident enough to attempt something new or different.

Learning

New skills – 'I always enjoyed learning things'

... I've learned dress-making and woodwork and now flower arranging and that's one of the hobbies at the moment that I really enjoy. Alice

Kate is improving her tennis game and finding that her backhand shots are more predictable. *I always find it more frustrating I'm often ahead of myself [in her head] when I'm learning a new skill than my physical, although I do pick things up quickly I like to be able to depend on my physical skills, so I've got to that point now where I'm a competent tennis player so it's just going to be a matter of getting better and better.*

Margie was not very good at *making friends easily, even though I'd like to I don't have very good social skills, and I'm not very good at breaking the ice in those sort of situations, so she joined St John's Ambulance Service as a recruit. I would certainly be the oldest person there, many of them are about eighteen to twenty-five or so. But it's just so rewarding, I love to be mixed up with young people, it just gets me out of the groove I tend to get into being a fairly solitary type sometimes a bit too much for my own good. I tend to avoid social situations, but this has forced me to get mixed up with these very lively and enthusiastic young people as well as practising my First Aid.*

Mandy's mother did a lot of sewing but she did not have the patience to teach her, she was left-handed which made it more difficult. *After she died I began to take an interest in sewing. Then I gradually got into it and now I make all my clothes, and this gives her a sense of achievement.*

Patty really enjoyed kayaking. *I give most things a go. Took up kayaking at the beginning of this year, and am totally wrapped in it. I can even get out of a kayak upside down. Because I found out I could do it. I was scared stiff. ... I always had a fear of rivers and of reservoirs, deep still water, I don't know why, so I felt I overcame two fears in learning that...*

Patria and her partner established *a little a cappella singing group that used to meet in their house once a week and we'd sing together, and it was great learning new things about singing.*

I love working on computers. I've met people all over the world, including one in the U.K. and in Alaska. I'm having a lovely time, it's wonderful.

Sarah

Meryn wanted to do a women's studies course, so I decided I'd do this one at TAFE [Tertiary and Further Education College]. *I thoroughly enjoyed it, it was wonderful, that was a great experience for me.*

Being challenged **'it gives me satisfaction'**

Helen is involved with a new initiative for people with disabilities. The project is to develop a radio programme for the aged. *Even though I'm nervous about finding my way to the place for the interview I'm quite scared about it all. Part of me is petrified, and part of me is lapping it up.*

Jenny is *thoroughly enjoying work. There's a whole lot of reasons. It's a real challenge on the research of things, you find something you don't know a whole lot about, you research it with books and with other people. It's this whole expanse of knowledge I find exciting, it's more than work.*

Margie also joined a Lifesaving course and found that meeting challenges gives her pleasure, *it gives me satisfaction if I meet a challenge. ... I stuck at that until I had my Bronze Medallion. I felt quite proud of that, and once again I was by far the oldest doing it and the average age of the young people was about twenty. So it was even more satisfying, I suppose, knowing that they certainly had the physical advantage of youth, but I still managed to do it, so that was quite gratifying.*

Feeling confident **Being powerful/influential – 'it's a buzz and excitement'**

Bet calls herself *a natural librarian* and after doing the library course she went back to the library in the Senior School and recalls, *I had ten really good years, doing what I could and doing it well and feeling really empowered by being skilled, knowing I was skilled and really enjoying the exercising of that skill ... It was a wonderful, wonderful time, I was so happy.*

Kate enjoys running workshops, *I get a real buzz, when I'm being powerful, or leading well, and I do lead well I get a sense of ... it's the same thing it's not the exhaustion I feel around physical, but it's a buzz and excitement, and I love sharing my thinking and I love hearing the interaction that we have, but I love leading too 'cos then you can make things go the way you want them to go. So it is similar, a similar buzz.*

Fulfilment – 'you contribute to the world'

Gloria's work gives her pleasure. Yes, [it is integrated] and it is because that's where you feel, it's so vital to me apart from the money, because that's where you contribute to the world that's where you have a value so that is important but it just happens there are terrific women there, and it's an assisting job and I'm really good at helping.

Gestures, the theatre company would have to be the most fulfilling part of my life and second the drama study. That was something I always wanted to do, and every Saturday these wonderful women and the work that we did was so rewarding and they were so exceptional and they've become really successful. It is the most fulfilling time of my life. Helena

Being successful – 'a big boost and a lot of pleasure'

A family newsletter has given Margie a lot of confidence in herself. I'm about to do my fourth one for the year, and it has been a remarkable success. It's given me a big boost and a lot of pleasure, because I've been the recipient of all the contributions. I prepare what they have sent to me for the newsletter and it has been the greatest fun you can possibly imagine ... I've found that has given me a great deal of pleasure and brought me in closer contact with members of the family which has been lovely ...

FLOW

The following description of flow was read to the women:

When I stop to think about it I realise that an important part of this state of mind is enjoyment. I get so involved in what I'm doing, I almost forget about time. When I experience this state of mind, I feel really free from boredom and worry. I feel like I'm being challenged or that I am very much in control of my action and my world. I feel like I am growing and using my best talents and skills; I am on top of my situation (Allison & Duncan 1988, p.121).

The women were then asked if they could identify with all or any of these aspects and would they describe any of their own experiences that would fit this concept. All of the women were able to talk about specific activities and situations that related to the flow experience criteria. After hearing the description of the flow state, several of the women described a particular adventure, event, happening or situation from their lives. These events appeared to include most of the factors that are associated with the flow concept that such as challenge, time, involvement, and feeling on top of the world which also relate to several of the enjoyment themes presented in the previous section of this chapter.

The themes have evolved from the accounts by the women of the experiences as they relate to the flow description.

The following table depicts the main themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the interviews with the women.

Table Five

FLOW THEMES
The lived experience of flow
Being there
Indescribable
Being physical
An intellectual challenge
All consuming projects
Relating to flow
Lived time
Losing it, and getting away
Awareness of time
The challenge
Thriving on challenge
Being in control
Feeling empowered
To know yourself
Involvement
Forgetting about everything else
Losing yourself
A close relationship
Losing control and a sense of responsibility
A state of mind
Meditative experiences
Just being there
Contentment

The lived experience of flow

Being in the flow state evokes feelings of satisfaction, a sense of independence and is intrinsically rewarding. There is a merging of action and awareness such that the participant is lost within the experience. As Gloria said, *I think it's ... when you're not aware of time, when you're so involved. Yes that's the drifting into this state of timelessness and just contentment within yourself, yes ... so you lose time.* Although the experience may not be regarded as leisure or entertainment it does produce a mental state that most women described as enjoyable.

Whether it was a late winter/spring of flow, such as Winnie experienced when she was building her new laundry, or a shorter span of time that was involved – while gardening, doing tapestry, or walking – the women are able to become totally involved to the extent that as Barb said *nothing else matters*. Rhoda when talking about square-dancing said *you can't think about anything else 'cos you'll lose your place and muck up eight people – yes, you get really involved in it.* This flow state helps to integrate the self and when the flow experience is over there is a feeling of being more together (Csikszentmihalyi 1990); and as Patty said *it restores my sense of self*. While the flow experience for some was associated with being active, for others it occurred in association with a more passive, meditative state as Margie found when she was *looking out at the sea and doing this little painting*.

The following examples of flow experiences described by the women all have aspects of this balance of skills and challenge as well as involvement and losing a sense of time. These descriptions also amplify many of the enjoyment themes thus providing a close link between the concept of flow and enjoyment. This will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

Being there

Indescribable – 'Like in another world'

[The flow description] *comes closest to an experience I had in Kakadu, Ubiri rock, a place full of Aboriginal cave paintings. About fifteen of us, all friends, went there together but in a significant sense we were each alone and strongly affected by the sacredness of the site. It was in a sense exhausting because of the climb. I think that would be an experience that was closest to that, when I was so involved like in another world. And there was the physical element of breathing and walking and the spiritual element of*

getting in touch with years of past experience. It was just so beautiful, you could see for miles from the top of this rock in every direction. I think if I had experiences of that kind I would relate them to being out-of-doors in Australia. Somewhere where you've got the sense of the continuity of time and usually some exertion. In this description Patria identified with several aspects of the flow concept. These include: being involved, like in another world; a challenge because of the climb. As well as these she includes the physical and spiritual aspects and a sense of wonder at the beauty of the Australian landscape.

It was another beautiful day and I was sitting overlooking a calm, sheltered bay and again it was very quiet there was no-one else around, except my husband and he didn't get in my way, and while I was looking at the sea and doing this little painting – capturing this beautiful scene I just felt, I think I experienced a moment of perfect happiness, indescribable. Margie

You can have experiences with little things as well, like seeing a flower grow and looking at some really insignificant things. Some time ago when I was in Greece I was up in this mountain, it was just a heap of rocks, it was September or October the sun was really very hot, it killed all the vegetation especially in these rocks. And then the first rain comes and these cyclamens, these wild cyclamens come out you know, little mauve, pink ones and they were so beautiful and they just give you a kind of experience that that's the way you see the face of God. Andie

Being physical – 'Nothing else matters'

The combination of physical activity and being out-of-doors provided the components of a flow experience for these women. Meryn found she was totally involved and not thinking about anything else when she was in Scotland for the first time. *I met this relation of mine who was nearly seventy and was a mountain climber, so he wanted to take me up all the mountains in Scotland, so here I was at fifty-five climbing all the 3,000ft mountains and being on the end of a rope! And I'd get half way up and be dangling with this precipice below me and this rock face in front of me and thinking, what the hell am I doing here? It was a challenge ... a flow experience and I wasn't thinking about anything else.*

One of the great moments of my life was swimming on the Barrier Reef, snorkelling and seeing the fish. Now I remember that was another great experience, a flow experience. Out of our world. Those experiences are quite

magic. I certainly feel that it stayed with me as an experience that I kept going back to in my head, a renewal. Patria

When I walk along the beach I feel really there, because there's the smell and a lovely sunset. And nothing else matters, there's nothing else bothering me and there's just me and the sea. Barb

I always feel like that when I do the little climbs I do forget the time and you're going along and really enjoying it, not looking around and when you get to the top you go ooooooh! You really feel good about that, I can go with that [flow]. Mary

Sarah is aware of the need to get away from her structured life and go walking in the bush for the day and says, yes that's getting into the flow of nature and yourself and talk when you want to, ... it's important to your soul.

An intellectual challenge – 'I just seem to get into this world'

*Studying, reading, writing and thinking provided many women with the opportunity to stretch their minds – getting ideas and making connections – to make a flow experience. Raven and Patria get involved when they are writing. Raven finds it fulfilling but not necessarily enjoyable and said *I have the skills and there is the challenge too ... It's hard yakka torn out of my soul, but I can really get involved in it ... I do all the things to avoid doing it, but I know when I do get into it, it is fantastic.* And Patria also gets 'lost', *I'm out of touch with everything when I'm there.**

As Andie said, reading does that for me reading a book, not all books of course just some books. So you just ... time does fly, for me – from the very beginning reading English books was a challenge I can read much better than I can speak. And also Lindy finds she just has to finish the book and get another one straight away.

For Gale, ideas challenge me and give me that feeling, ideas that extend my perception of the world. Both reading and talking about them or just contemplating them. I'm a lateral thinker, I come across something and it will set off a train of thought and there will be a revelation about something else totally different in my life that kind of thing is a real buzz. Making those connections, the interconnectedness of the things in my life.

Alice and Barb also described the times when they were studying and enjoying being in a flow state.

Yes, whenever I'm studying ... Tuesday nights up in the library ... all day Wednesday ... yes it's just like that, any time there's any stress it's writing essays so that's only once a semester. I really like doing that, I really like finding out new things and fitting one thing with another and then going and talking about it with someone. It's the intellectual aspect ... Alice

Yes I felt that this year in my study I've really been enjoying this. I've felt really good about it. Just at the moment I'm doing an essay and I really feel this enjoyment through study I'm able to remember everything I read and I know exactly where I want to look it up to quote it properly I suddenly realised that it's doing it alone. Yesterday I sat down and wrote six pages it just sort of flowed, and I really felt good. There was no hesitancy, or feeling that I wasn't sure. Everything went so well. Barb

All consuming projects – 'I really got into it'

... the time I took long-service leave to build my laundry. I lost all sense of time then, I had no other commitments and one day merged into another. And it was one time in my life I remember everyday waking up and smiling and getting out of bed as soon as I woke up and going straight into it ... so it was a flow ... not just a couple of hours of flow, it was late winter/spring of flow and one task merged into another and each task had its own momentum and logic and they all followed on logically from each other and I was learning skills as I went. Winnie's experience lasted several months when she was totally focused on the project and it took over her life.

Gladys almost *felt like that* with the patchwork, which surprised her. She only had a limited time to complete the project ... *so I really got into it, I've got to get this done. I mean I was staying up late at night which is a thing I don't normally do and getting up next morning and going off to work and not feeling tired. A feeling I haven't had for a long time. It's taken me a long time to [get over] the break-up of the marriage and yeah it's been funny, I haven't thought much about it but it was an experience I haven't had for a long time.*

Relating to flow

Although many of the women described a particular flow experience they also identified with the overall sense of flow. As Patty announced *flow sounds like my daily life* and Kate said, *yes, that's exactly me, I can relate to*

that completely. The expression 'going with the flow' has become common parlance for many of these women and usually means being involved and not concerned with outside factors such as time and expectations of others. These women have become absorbed in their 'new' lives and are choosing to live their own lives without the constant responsibility of family members.

Lived time

Losing it and getting away – 'time takes longer'

The time factor was readily identifiable by many of the women. This aspect of flow has similarities to the enjoyment themes where the women expressed the importance of having time and space for themselves. But in this theme the women are expressing their enjoyment in losing the awareness of time when they get completely involved.

Gloria expresses the complexity of this theme when she said, *I think it's the time that registers, when you're not aware of time when you're so involved. Yes that's the drifting into this state of timelessness and just contentment within yourself, yes ... so you lose time. But time takes longer, you seem to have more time, time goes slower to me and that's very satisfying and I don't think it matters what I'm doing then.*

Merry finds it happens when she is out in the garden and *time and reality get right away.* And Gale said if she is not interrupted by her children she *gets away from it.* It could be reading ... *and also when I'm writing or sometimes when I'm just outside by myself.*

Winnie lost all sense of time when she was doing her laundry project, as she said *I had no other commitments and one day merged into another.*

Awareness of time – 'time is controlling me'

A few women described situations where they were unable to lose their awareness of time.

Oh yes doing teddy bears you could get away, but you're inside. I think time gets away from you when you're out-of-doors. Indoors there's always a clock around, I've got a big grandfather clock so I'm aware of time inside, but outside you're right away from it. Mandy

Very seldom do I get so involved that I forget about time. I often think to forget about time is easy for lots of people, but I started school when I was five and finished when I was fifty-four, so for all those fifty years my life was structured by bells. Bet

I think most of the time I think that time is controlling me. I can be enjoying something and then I get interrupted because I think ... I've got these responsibilities. I've got to get this much into a day, and a day's not long enough ... So I would say I go with the flow to a certain point and then time hits me and I shut it off. Wanda

That [flow state] mightn't last all day. Lindy.

But when you're so connected with time, that can only come in holiday times for me ... when you don't have to set the alarm so you lose time. Gloria

The challenge

Thriving on challenge – 'without a challenge ... just no satisfaction'

This aspect was also one that several women related to. Margie finds ... without a challenge there is just no satisfaction ... meeting a challenge like that is very satisfying and that is part of the happiness. Merry also can relate quite well to that [challenge aspect]. Josie loves a challenge, I think I thrive on a challenge ... I didn't think I had the skills, but I did it when she went canoeing (which she described as an enjoyable experience). And Helena said, I really get involved with making this radio documentary, every little win, every step of the way. Yes, I think that's why I've loved those times because I just forget about everything else. It's a challenge and I've got the skills.

Being in control

Feeling empowered – 'setting goals and planning my life'

I like working where there are people involved, I'd like to do that again. When I was in that situation I did feel in control, I was setting goals and planning my life my daily routine. Sarah

I'm in control most of the time nowadays, because I know there were many years when I was out of control and I'm very much aware of that. Josie

To know yourself

The interviews gave the women an opportunity to explore some of their own views and ideas about their own actions and behaviour. As Meg mused, *yes I suppose my feeling is my life is like that, it's not something about one single incident it's more like, this is the path I'm meant to be on.* In some cases this came as a revelation and they speculated on their motivations and endeavoured to develop an explanation for these. *With life experiences you learn to know yourself.* Barbara

The experience of being totally involved and losing one's self was described by many of the women. They thought it involved a sense of forgetting about everything else other than the task at hand. It could happen in various situations, either at home or in the workplace.

Involvement

Forgetting about everything else – 'I'm not aware of the outside world'

I couldn't think of anything else, but just getting up there [flying]. Patty

When she is working with children and parents Ngaire is not aware of time and what is going on around her ... *so much so that where we've been told we should stay for just half an hour to an hour I invariably find I'm still there after three hours especially if the children are home.*

Others get involved in their paid work. Patria said *I think I get involved in work in that way. I can get the papers for a board meeting and be oblivious to everything else while I'm working my way through that.* When Bet goes to work, *I'd think about work and I'd come home and I'd think about work, because once you start that sort of thing connections happen.* Raven who is a psychologist finds that *the consulting is good too because I'm really with the person.* And Meg said ... *but I also really get involved with the massage and I'm not aware of the outside world, so I'm really there.*

I have recreational things on my computer as well as work things, and one of them is family history and I take great delight in opting out as I call it, and I'll spend a few hours which might grow into the whole day I get really wrapped in it and when a phone call comes through, I don't want to know, I'm really involved in what I'm doing. Sarah.

Losing yourself – 'I really do go away'

This theme is similar to the previous one but several of the women specifically talked about losing themselves in various activities, which perhaps has a slightly different connotation to 'forgetting about everything else'.

I can completely lose myself in a jigsaw or crossword puzzle. The flow stuff. Lynne. And Merry said, ... but certainly a good book, or a good film I just lose myself in it.

Mary also gets involved in different ways and experiences the feelings of flow when she is reading. ... *oh yes for reading, I don't hear a thing you go off and you think oh I've been reading for a couple of hours. Yeah you can't put it down and you're carrying it around if it's good, yes. And completely lose yourself, yes that's true ... And also when she is gardening I find it quite therapeutic now I get out there and I go off into day-dreams and I'm miles away it probably is that flow, and I've never thought of it that way. ... I get pleasure out of seeing it finished and that's a difference and that is a flow, I really do go away.*

A close relationship – 'Totally me with another woman'

Times when I've experienced it have been with the Rainbow Circle group ... and a couple of times when a friend and I have gone away on a holiday together, a walking holiday. Some years ago we spent a week walking in the Grampians and that was a wonderful week ... that was great. I was away from the family and I could be totally me with another woman. We would walk and push ourselves in that way and do a lot of talking and a lot of sharing, it was great. Meryn.

Losing control and a sense of responsibility – 'I'm out of myself'

Winnie talked about reading ... *that's a classic for me, I mean I actually lose control sometimes when I'm reading, so that I push everything forward, my life doesn't start again until I've got to the end of the book. That's sometimes a bit scary because I lose all sense of responsibility, it's a complete take-over bid by the book and I can be taken over ... (laughter). I'm out of myself, I'm not there any more I'm in the book. Wanda also commented about reading, except sometimes when I'm reading like in bed yesterday I sat there and read historical romances all day, so I suppose I was going with the flow in a sense then because I thought to hell with the Italian to hell with everything I'm just going to sit here and be a nothing.*

Gloria gets a little concerned when she is meeting new people ... *when you're right in there and then you come back to your usual life, and then you think I don't think I'll do that again because this spins me around.* It also happens at other times *certainly when I was studying, yes that was a bit like reading or the movies. I have a lot of trouble making those transitions from those times back to reality again.*

A state of mind

Meditative experiences – 'A sense of peace and harmony'

Mary gets into a meditative flow state when she is ironing, *I go miles away into a dream and do my dream ... I put records on that I like full blast and iron away and I don't hear them 'cos I'm miles away until the record's finished and I've almost finished the ironing. I do that quite a lot, people come in and say that's loud but I can't hear it when I'm ironing.*

During a meditative walk on her own Gladys finds that *often things that have been sitting around come up and I deal with them or make a plan to do something, but I always come back feeling relaxed. That's why I prefer to walk by myself, 'cos I don't get any of that when I walk with a group.*

Alice is aware of ... *a sense of peace and harmony there because of the quietness and stillness of the water and the absence of distractions ... meditative too, and I think that's one of the things that attracts me in canoeing*

Just being there – 'You stop thinking'

Jenny remembers her father telling her, *whatever you do, do it well and recognise it for yourself. So whatever I do I do that, and I enjoy what I'm doing so I put myself there, whether it's cutting the grass out there, and I enjoy that, and so then I set it as a challenge and do it well.*

To 'just be' is important to these two women: *I'd like to be in a state where all reason was gone, like rational thinking, when you stop thinking ... that's what you feel when you're in the bush more, yes you don't have to think and analyse you just be. Gloria.*

... I've sort of learned to just be, and that's not an easy thing for me necessarily and just go with the flow ... getting involved in these things and then life just flows along. Lindy

Contentment – 'peace of mind'

A feeling of peace and contentment was mentioned by Gloria and Merry. *Some Sundays when I know I'm not likely to see anyone and I haven't planned anything – for the first two hours I feel like a social outcast, a feeling of purposelessness and then I drift into this state [of flow]. Yes that's the drifting into this state of timelessness and just contentment within yourself, yes.* Gloria

Yes, I do when I'm in the garden. I get a real peace of mind and enjoyment
Merry

SUMMARY

Enjoyment and enjoyable experiences are not few and far between for these women. They find enjoyment in many places, spaces and times in their lives. The experience may vary depending on the conditions. For example several women had a strong affinity with water and being in or on water ensured an enjoyable experience. Whether they are alone or with others also affects the level of enjoyment. The situations they describe are not out of the ordinary, on the whole, they are part of their everyday living. The women appear to become energised, confident and empowered in these experiences thus enabling enjoyment to be an integral part of their lives.

The flow experience is one that can occur at any time and can be for a relatively short time or can last for a period of weeks or months. The findings of the women in this study in relation to flow encompass a whole range of flow experiences. Although the initial description that was read provided the basic parameters of flow, their own accounts expanded on these and indicated a fuller acceptance of the concept in their lives.

Although the themes for enjoyment and flow have been written up separately in this chapter, there are many common themes which will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

The concepts of enjoyment and flow defy segmentation and by bringing these two concepts together with health and leisure a wider understanding of midlife women's lives can be achieved. The final findings chapter follows and extends these concepts into a more holistic view of how these women envisage the whole of their lives now and in the future.

CHAPTER EIGHT: FINDINGS PART 3

CREATING/COMPOSING ENJOYABLE LIVES

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the chapter on enjoyment and flow there appeared to be an underlying theme which suggested that the choices these women were making were aimed at having, or leading to an enjoyable life. Many of these midlife women appear to be in the act of composing their lives (Bateson 1989). They are not always aware of this, but enjoyment, in most cases, is either an explicit or implicit assumption in this process.

Developing an effective understanding of the lifeworlds of these women could be compared to putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to get the whole picture. In the process of women composing their lives, the challenge "comes from the realisation of multiple alternatives and the invention of new models" (Bateson 1989, p. 62). This process involves the woman being aware of what is best for her, given past experience, knowing what she enjoys and choosing to create and assemble a new pattern for her life. Several of the women commented as to the value of the interviews in providing them with the opportunity to contemplate their lives, both past present, as well as to verbalise their thoughts and dreams for the future. The responses to the questions enabled these midlife women to help concretise their wishes and desires and perhaps initiate some actions which would set them on the road towards realising some of their dreams. The following table outlines the themes and sub-themes for this chapter.

Table Six:

COMPOSING THEIR LIVES THEMES

Creating/composing enjoyable lives

Life now is ... hey, this is your life mate

Very independent
Fulfilled, good, lovely, in balance
Manageable
Sometimes a struggle, stressful, difficult and frustrating
No new challenges
Being creative

Choosing to choose

Time to stop postponing my life

Knowing what I need
Choosing to be with others
Making it happen
Feelings of freedom
Being on own

Midlife – a new stage

Sorting out what I want

Increased self-esteem
Embracing change
Making a break
Needing other people
Ambitions for the future
A financially secure future
Ageing and health concerns/constraints

Enjoyment is implicit in the dream for the future

Life is too short for shit

Different living arrangements.
New environments.
Be more self-indulgent.
Mostly content

Creating/composing an enjoyable life

These women have all noticed changes in the way they view their lives now that they are in midlife. Several of them have recently been divorced or separated after being married for many years. This change of status appears to have had a significant effect on their lives. As Winnie said *the biggest difference is stopping being a wife*. Although not all the women were able to feel entirely positive about their lives at the time of the interviews, the majority said they were very satisfied.

Life now is ... Hey, this is your life mate!

Very independent – 'How I wanted it to be'

When asked 'how do you feel about your life now?' the overall response was a positive one. Margie summed this up when she said *I've been postponing the rest of my life long enough*. Meryn injected a note of caution and apprehension regarding her future when she said *What's going to happen is always a little bit scary because it's the unknown, but I always find once I get there that's fine, and then that's the here and now*. While their lives are not necessarily a continuous flow of enjoyable experiences, most of the women appear to be actively seeking out ways of being in the world and composing a life that is fulfilling and 'good' for them. These women are, consciously or unconsciously, making choices that enable them to be in control and have enjoyable experiences now, as well as ensuring that they will continue to enjoy their lives in the future.

Gloria's comments, regarding her life now, appear to have been influenced by the death of her brother, as she said *that swings you around I mean Hey, this is your life mate*. This salutary event not only alerted her to her own mortality *perhaps that's why I don't think I'm afraid of old age as much*, but also provided the motivation to consciously examine her life and make decisions regarding her future. *My life now is how I'd imagined how I wanted it to be from years ago, I didn't know how it would be, but it feels as though this is what I thought I wanted and I didn't have a very clear picture of it 'cos I was too busy thinking I know what I don't want but I feel that now my life is how I wanted it to be, and that is very independent ... as it's turned out yes ... it's just got to be good and it is ... Most importantly I don't want to regret my life when I die and if I'm in a position to be able to enjoy my life I will*.

Fulfilled, good, lovely, in balance – 'Very contented'

Winnie thinks her life is *really in balance, it's quite harmonious.*

Josie has managed to overcome many difficulties and said *I feel as if I've achieved a lot of things, and I know I can live my life without drink and drugs, apart from those that keep me alive ... My life now is very fulfilled.* And Sandy commented, *my life now is good I'm doing the things I like to do, while Terry is just happy being fifty-three, and Lynne is also very contented.*

Manageable – mostly 'in control'

These two women are doing work they enjoy and this is enabling them to be financially independent and in control. As Jenny said *I'm enjoying what I'm doing. My work is enabling me to get myself back together financially, and Helena feels she is in a good situation and said because I'm being supported by the pension I can do this creative work that is so special.*

Mandy is having a good life it is *interesting, time-consuming, fun – it is reasonably contented, peaceful, most of the time. Yes most things are in my control.*

Dee had a few misgivings about her relationship, *I just feel a little bit held back with my relationship so that's the only thing that ever brings pain, but I think that's quite often the case with people in relationships. I have a pretty good opportunity to fly and do my own thing, but I see it as a trade off though, with the pleasure I get from the relationship I can't have everything my own way. So I can accept that. I think I have a really good life, I'm pretty contented,*

Two women expressed some doubts about their 'lot' as Rhoda said, *Oh yes generally speaking life is pretty good, but it is still only what you make it.* And Bet said *it's integrated, anyway, pretty mean material lots of the time but integrated.*

Sometimes a struggle and stressful – 'don't get enough time and space for me'

The following three women have caring responsibilities which may last, in Barb and Merry's cases 'for ever'. It was not necessarily evident in the early part of the interview but when they began to think about their future these responsibilities came to the fore. The realisation that their mortality will be

affected by the length of time and the degree of responsibility they will need to maintain during their lifetime.

It's a real struggle following my own desires, reading what I want to read and writing what I want to write, finding the time and space for that.

Realistically that struggle is going to continue for a few years, [she has two young children] and at times I feel I don't get enough time and space for me.
Gale

Barb, who has a dependent adult son, finds her life *at times [is] very stressful still. In fact the years of caring are building up ...* and Merry, whose husband is permanently confined to a wheel-chair, said *I just feel that a lot of serious things have happened to me and that has sort of curbed me.*

No new challenges – 'is there anything new?'

Gladys expressed some concern about her present attitude towards her life when she said, *pretty comfortable I think, sometimes I wonder whether it doesn't have enough challenges in it. That's perhaps why I feel a bit edgy at times, like when I said is there anything new? That feeling about what else is there? ... even in my reading I very rarely read a book that really grabs me. I enjoy books but nothing that ... gee I haven't thought about that before ...*

Margie, who described several experiences that were very enjoyable for her, also had some reservations about her life in the future. *Ummm my life, I suppose is reasonable, I'm constantly looking for fulfilment. If I'm not creating something or feeling useful I tend to feel very uncomfortable.*

Being creative – 'planting things'

Gardening and other activities around the house has provided the following women with a constant source of creativity and enjoyment. As Lynne said, *...and maybe interior design and gardening ... I love gardening, and I love thinking about garden design and planning it out ... I love that sort of activity.*

I just love gardening, I take a great delight in it. I've never been much of a gardener up to about a year ago until I moved into my new house ... I buy these little seedlings and before long they're growing and my garden is just lovely so that's one of my greatest joys and delights in life. Merry

I enjoy my house and decorating it. We've been doing this house up and I enjoy doing that, I enjoy cooking and gardening and I dressmake and I knit and I do a lot of craft things. Meg

... we've just got ourselves an allotment, very English, and we have had a lot of pleasure planting things again. Patria

Choosing to choose

The majority of the women in this study appeared to be actively choosing to live fulfilled, contented, enjoyable lives. They are realising they now have more choices and have learned from past experiences what suits them, and now they *don't do things that [they] don't want to do* as Alice said.

Time to stop postponing my life

Knowing what I need – 'I don't do things that I don't want to do', 'I'm creating the life I want'

An awareness of her own role in shaping a good life was demonstrated by Rhoda's comment, *generally life is pretty good, but it is still only what you make it*. Although Gale, who has two young children, realises she does *not get enough time and space for me*, Sandy says *I've got it together reasonably well and a sense of myself ... my life is now good* and Kate indicates she is feeling empowered when she states *I really love my life ... and I have a real sense of being able to create what I want..*

These women in midlife are, consciously or unconsciously, making choices that enable them to be in control and have enjoyable experiences now, as well as ensuring that they will continue to enjoy their lives in the future. As Kate said, *much of what I'm doing is ... I'm creating the life I want*.

Josie's comments indicate that she has a very positive outlook on her life. She said *I do have my own life. I've always been able to do that so I've never been tied to my kitchen sink, I've always done what I like ... nobody's going to sit on me, nobody's going to push me around*. While Terry and Patty 'don't care what the neighbours think' and have a similar understanding of their situation. As Terry said *I'm probably going through the best years of my life I would say. I don't bother about what anyone thinks. I've always lived my life the way I chose to ... I'm happy if I can have \$10 say to have a bet and have a beer on the weekend I'm just as happy being at home here pottering around doing things. I don't need to go out, I'm happy, I'm content*. And Patty said *I was very much raised to 'whatever will the neighbours think'. I wasted 30 years shaking off that image, the neighbours all think I'm eccentric*.

Three other women also said they 'do what they want to do'. They are making their own decisions and taking responsibility for their actions. As midlife women they do not feel the need to conform any more to other people's stereotypes. Now that her daughter is off her hands Mandy said *I can do what I like to do, not that I've ever had to answer to anyone, I've only ever known that anyway.* Alice said *I don't do things now that I don't want to do so much like going out bush, or meeting people that I don't want to like my husband's friends, he goes out bush with them and I stay at home and study.* And Lindy feels she has got more of a choice about the things I want to do and if people ask me to go somewhere or do something, I can decide whether I really want to or not, whether I want to go to a movie or a play or the folk club or something which I'd rather do than go to parties ... it just doesn't interest me any more.

I think it has been since I retired four years ago that I've begun to think what do I really want to do rather than what am I doing out of habit or what do I do because my husband wanted to do it. I think it's much more I'll do this because I want to. I would describe it [my life] as very pleasant. Full of possibilities ... Patria

Lynne has learnt what she finds enjoyable, *I do enjoy ... the things that relax me most are the crossword and jigsaw puzzles that have no value after they've been completed.*

Margie found that it has taken her a long time until I suppose about mid-life to realise that *I've been postponing the rest of my life long enough and that I eventually had to face the fact that I was doing this and do something about it. And now I have no further excuse, all the fledglings have left the nest and I have no further excuse to put off doing these things. So I took up canoeing at fifty-five and it's taken me this long to work out the kind of things that bring me happiness and peace which I find relaxing.*

Jenny has some definite ideas about what she needs in any future relationship ... *it will be most important that anyone I'm involved with in the future has her own life so that we have something to talk about and go off and do ... I am a loyal person when I'm in a relationship, because all my energy goes into that. But I feel I've now got enough confidence to say go and do what you want to do. I think that's a mature thing and I feel like that ... that's the first time I've ever said that ... (laughter).* And Lindy has got a much better quality of relating to people than I used to have. I'm much

more conscious of the process that goes on and can work out things now when there are conflicts, of course it's never conflict free.

Choosing to be with others – 'I'm a sociable person'

Friends and friendship are vital for many women to enjoy their lives. The women in this study provide evidence to support this statement. Whether it is to have a group of people around as Jenny said *who don't intrude but are there, and I can choose to be with them or not.* Or as Gale said for her *it is very important to have a network of friends locally ... so I leave the children alone at night for a short time and go down the road to see friends.*

Mary, Rhoda and Sarah enjoy being sociable and Patria enjoys entertaining friends. But Gladys appears to be more discerning when she said *I look at the groups of people I have, they all meet some need, there's something about a depth of need. I'd have to say M is my closest friend and we meet a lot of needs there. I don't want a whole lot of friendships ...*

Gladys is also intrigued because, as she said *I now search out company for holidays, whereas when it was a family, it was, let's get away, [from other people] a total turn around. It seemed like that was the one chance of the year to see my husband [before her divorce].*

For Dee *it's party-time I actually enjoy partying and people. I enjoy drinking then so I don't particularly enjoy partying without a drink 'cos I know it helps me loosen up and everyone else too. So I really enjoy parties.* And Patria *enjoys entertaining friends.*

Making it happen – 'a sense of being in charge'

Lindy has come to realise that *if you want certain things in life you have to have a certain amount of structure or a least some goals or a vision or something to work towards, and you have to take the steps in order to see that realised.* And Alice stated, *you can't just sit there and wait for it to happen, I really work hard to keep my friends the ones at Uni and the ones I used to work with. Keep in touch with the rellies I want to keep in touch with that's important to me.*

Two of the women cited examples where they had made decisions to ensure they would get what they wanted. Josie really enjoyed being at the Mid-life and Older Women's Festival. *I only put down for one day and then I ended up coming back for the next day too. It really made an impression on me.*

She changed her workshop and went into the next-door room where they were doing Spiritual Dancing. *Now here I am in my wheel-chair, so you can imagine how I felt. When I went in there I felt a bit intimidated, but the girl that was doing that made me feel really relaxed, it was just wonderful. I didn't feel discriminated against, that was very special. It was my birthday and that was what I wanted to do and it was great. And Margie, on her first canoe tour said, it was a carefully chosen tour, I picked a group of people, I knew one of them who was leading it and knew I would be happy with him. It all turned out so beautifully, I simply loved it.*

Patria and her partner decided to travel overseas soon after they had formed a relationship. They rented a cottage in the Dordogne and catered for themselves. They walked, explored and pretended to be French ... *that gave me enormous pleasure. I love speaking French and I love the markets and the streets and the village and the whole sense of community that I get when I'm in France. That was a great pleasure to me, it was spring and the country was so beautiful.*

Feelings of freedom – 'just to get away'

A need to get time and space on their own enabled some of the women to have a sense of freedom. Whether it was, as Gale said *hopping on a train and coming into town just totally by myself.* Or Margie, when she described her canoeing trip, *just to get away from the usual life-support systems you live with all the time and just have the bare essentials. There was something about that that just appealed to me very much. I just enjoyed that more than I could possibly describe.*

Meg remembered an earlier time in her life that she enjoyed. *I was single and living in a shared house and always going out to bands, and I had money to spend and it was just the feeling of freedom.* And Mandy recognised her situation as having freedom, in terms of time, when she can stay in bed late and said *if I decide to go out late in the afternoon to visit someone, I just drop everything and take off.*

Being on own – 'not feeling coupled'

Several of the women commented on the need to be regarded as an individual not as a partner of someone. Gale said, *I like going out with a lover, but I also like going out with friends and not feeling coupled.*

Gloria found the canoeing trip *was significant, and because I was there as myself and so that was related to my life of independence too.* Winnie also feels it is important to be *in an equal group of people, no gender divisions or couple divisions.*

Midlife – a new stage

Many of the women appear to be regarding midlife as a new stage. As Patria said... *divorce was a new beginning and then retirement was another one.* Kate at forty-three said, *it just gets better and better, a sense of being in charge with what I'm doing which I completely lost in my mid twenties. I generally live with a real sense of excitement about being alive.* Mary feels it is a new stage because her children are now able to look after themselves and *now it's good because if I don't want to do tea, I don't do tea, and they all muck in and do their own. This new woman they have to live with now they have to put up with ... I'm really at a time of my life when I'm really enjoying myself. I think I've got rid of all the hang-ups I had when I was younger.*

Sorting out what I want

Increased self esteem and a sense of independence – 'stopping being a wife'

Several of the women who have had a change of status and moved out of marriages, for various reasons, appear to be in the process of rethinking usual and or previous patterns and working out what suits them. They made some very lucid statements regarding the effect this change has had on their lives. Raven commented that *really it was coming out of marriage that helped me sort some of that out. Enjoyment, I've always thought that part of my role in life was to bring joy to others (laughter).* [In terms of enjoyment there is] *a difference in attitude, a change in belief. The belief that I am allowed to enjoy myself, a belief that wasn't there in pre mid-life.* In most cases this also means, as Gloria stated, *I feel that now my life is how I wanted it to be, and that is very independent. Independent to the stage that I really think that that is more important than sharing it.*

Four years ago Lynne left a situation that she felt was very good for her [marriage], it was very supportive and very satisfying. *I think that I never would have moved from that if I hadn't discovered that there was another option and one that was more satisfying. It was still very very difficult ... I know I've made the right choice, I also know that lifestyle offered me a lot of things too. And it's hard living as a lesbian too, there's not the same*

acceptance, [although] everyone has been very very accepting ... So my life is different now, I have myself to consider and that is lovely,

After her divorce Winnie bought a small farm. I've learnt an enormous amount of skills. I've had to learn how to run a pump. I had to go through all the business of selecting and buying a pump and maintaining it, and a tractor. And a chainsaw, I love my chainsaw, I love the sense of power I have using it. Part of it is that it's seen as a masculine activity and I like claiming more and more masculine activities and getting to understand why men hang on to them so much. No wonder they drive bull-dozers, it's lovely it's great fun ... The biggest difference is stopping being a wife,

Patty is a totally different person from what she used to be when she was married. Yes I'm an absolute nut. It's been this nut inside that's struggling to get out and I like the nut. I spent thirty-seven years not liking myself, being told there was nothing there to like. That was from my mother, my oldest sister, my brother, my first husband, my second husband, and you come to believe it after a while ... I have no worries about sharing any aspect of myself or my life with anybody.

Embracing change – 'how I value my life'

The following women have become aware of changes in their attitudes towards themselves as Sarah said, *I'm fifty-one now and I have noticed a difference, there has been a big change in lots of my attitudes, and also their behaviour.* For some this has happened after a change of status or a tragedy, for others it appears to be a realisation they need to look after themselves.

Because of a family tragedy, Gloria has become more conscious of valuing her life. *I always thought I was in to treasure the moment treasure life, it has a different meaning now and I think it has a different meaning 'cos I'm mid-life, it has a different meaning because of my brother's death. To me, that was the gift he gave to me, by dying, as to now how I value my life, 'cos what I learnt at the Child Care centre which was the best personal move, was to value yourself and believe in yourself and feel that you had the right to your own life how ever you wanted to live it.*

Meryn acknowledged the role of the women's movement in helping her make changes, *I think as a teen-ager I conformed much more to what was expected of me and now I'm less a conformer and much more looking for what I want for myself and going for it. I've been scared about it sometimes*

but nevertheless going for it ... it has been increasingly more important to feel good about doing things for myself.

Mandy has made some decisions about improving her health. I've decided I'm grossly over weight and I go to a gym four times a week. I gave up smoking about seven years ago and I put on lots of weight after that. I feel much better now that I'm exercising and I've got more energy.

... one of the reasons I drank was so I wouldn't have to face responsibilities, believe it or not I used to be very timid. My outlook on life now is nobody's going to sit on me, nobody's going to push me around. Josie

Making a break – 'A new beginning'

After her husband died Merry returned to England in 1989 and stayed for several years. She returned two years ago. I did a lot of positive things I always wanted to do, so that really was a new beginning for me mentally more than anything else. I made that break, I found I was quite happy to stand on my own and I can accept all those things that being on your own means ... I feel confident in my ability to provide for myself and my [adult] children. I guess a new confidence. Merry

Sarah and her husband have been working out what their next step will be. Yes, well it's certainly going to be a new era for us, I find it exciting ... Life is a little unexpected, so that's exciting and challenging and I'm very happy about it.

Needing other people – 'I get lonely sometimes'

Gladys commented, there are times when I feel lonely and I think it would be nice to have another few closer friends. The interesting thing is that almost without exception the friends that I have are all married, and I've found that wherever I've gone on holidays I've tended not to meet people who don't have partners. I'm not seeking a partner at all, if it happened, I can't picture it. I'm very content with my own company and I don't want to change that part of it, but it's just this having to always be the initiator which is not me, and that's an effort for me.

And Merry said, [it's good] most of the time, I get lonely sometimes for a close emotional relationship 'cos I haven't had one for a few years now.

Ambitions for the future – 'I want to be more successful'

Some of the women were very clear about what they want for themselves in the future. Josie wants to be more educated now that she is writing her book. *I find I do have problems about putting my thoughts down on paper. And Alice's ambition in life is to do a PhD. I'd really like to do a cross-cultural study ... I'd really like to go to America and do one of those Summer Schools, it would be fun.*

Andie wants ... *to find a better job and Kate wants to be more successful I want to be paid well ... Success for me is being respected for what I do and acknowledged, and with that is being well known, and particularly I want to be seen ... and I'm really glad that now, in my forties, I'm not doing mindless work*

A financially secure future – 'something to work towards'

Some of the women, when thinking about securing their future were concerned about financial matters. They realise that they need to have a certain degree of financial security if they want to continue enjoying their lives as they grow older. As Gladys said, *I think my main apprehension is this whole economic thing that I feel very shaky about. I know I will manage on what I've got but I'm really worried about how much it will restrict me. 'Cos I know that I live in some restriction now and I'm happy with the restriction and I'm comfortable with it but I don't know how much more I'm prepared to cut back.*

There is a note of uncertainty and anxiety regarding managing financially for some of these women, especially those who are living on their own. *I think finances are a constraint on my lifestyle, said Raven. [They] have been for a long time and I think anyone on a pension would say the same thing. And a woman who has been married and has come out of a long marriage and tried pretty unsuccessfully to get work, there's no Superannuation there's no thought of ... if they cut out the pension by the time I'm sixty, there are a lot of anxieties around finance. I think, finding one can't work in one's forties in mid-life, and not wanting to be dependent on anyone else ...*

Kate said, *I consider my forties as my time financially to make my life secure. I don't have Superannuation, I don't have any of that, it's not important to me I know that I won't need that, but I know I do want to have my house paid off and be comfortable.*

Meryn realised that her money anxieties were not so much of a concern after she thought about it. *I was trying to focus on it the other day, actually when I was in for my acupuncture session, and I was thinking about ... OK you'll go on the pension, you won't have so much money, but what will you have to do without? And there was not very much I could think about, and I think I'm a reasonably resourceful person.*

Ageing and health concerns/constraints – 'but how long have I got?'

Patria has become very aware of her state of health now that she is retired, and presumably old. *One of the odd things about being retired is that, especially if you're dealing with someone who is very very sick, and I have three friends who are very sick with cancer at the moment, there's always this sense of well I'm lucky to be here with the health that I've got, but how long have I got? So I want to do lots of things while I still feel fit enough to do them.*

My health is a constraint, and I've been told not to complain I shouldn't expect to feel twenty-seven when I'm forty-seven [!] Raven

Enjoyment is implicit in the dream for the future

The women were asked at the end of the interview the following question: 'If you didn't have any restrictions and you had the freedom to choose how you lived your life, what would you be doing?' Gale made an interesting observation when she said, *I find when I have no restrictions I have no structure and I have real trouble making that structure for myself. She needs to have specific activities to do, such as writing, that's what I would be doing with my life, plus leisure activities such as rowing, and bush-walking.*

One woman responded with the following, *I want to live a fulfilling life and forcing myself into some menial job isn't going to bring any meaning to my life, it might bring the dollars in but I sort have made a compact with myself that that's not how I want to live my life ... Lindy encapsulates the notion of a holistic lifestyle when she continued in a thoughtful way ... it's about the art of living and that's like the flow of life, there's no separation between all those things, I thought yeah, that's what it's all about 'cos we compartmentalise everything. [Describing a television programme].*

Not all the women wanted to talk about their dream.

No it's too hard, I'm not into day dreaming. I think it's harmful to daydream like that because it raised your expectations and makes life seem a lot greyer.

M. Yes I suppose that's so, but some people get off on that.

B. Well that's their choice, I don't want to walk down that road. That's the broad one that leads to destruction, I'd rather stick to the straight and narrow. Bet

Alternatively, Lynne responded, OOOOh that's a wonderful question, a wonderful question ... but despite being excited about the question continued with a rather vague comment about the future, I think it is important to think about how we would live our lives without constraints. I think a lot of it would be very similar, 'cos I do enjoy mostly what I'm doing.

Some of the women spoke about living in different situations and travel was a dream for many of them. The themes that follow indicate the range of ideas these women have regarding their *next step of life*.

'life is too short for shit'

Different living arrangements – 'living on my own', 'in a commune situation' or 'in the country'

Three of the women would choose to be living on their own.

I'd be living alone with my cats.. Alice

Mary often imagines herself living somewhere by the beach on my own with my dog doing what I want to do, 'cos although you say what you want to do it's always restricted because you can't exactly do what you want to do 'cos you've got to think does it fit in with everyone else? I just think there'll probably be time in the future when I'll be on my own and I probably think to myself that I've got that now and I'll look back at the times and think that was great and hopefully I'll be able to move on to my next step of life ... when I am on my own which could be sad at the beginning but hopefully something else would come out of that.

Ngairé would like to be on the move living in a caravan or a truck, or a campervan, and I would just live where I pleased and I'd go hiking and sit down with my paints and paint things.

A few of the women would like to be with others in some type of community. *I think I would choose to live in a commune situation, rather like the Nimbim situation back to nature type of lifestyle, where you can live as a small community with those spiritual satisfactions of living close to the land but also having the support of a like-minded group of people. ... I don't want the really dull drudgery of getting up at first light and getting the fire going. But I'd certainly like a small community existence, that would appeal to me.* Merry

For Sandy, *paradise is living in the country, and living in a community with women – a health retreat.*

Oh I'd have to think about that, I know I'd go 'bush' but what I'd do up there I don't know. I know I'd head for the bush, I love the place, and I know I've got to go although I don't really know why ... I've got a feeling I'll be in an Aboriginal community, but it's something I know I've got to do, I don't know whether other people feel like this ... Patty

Some of the women wanted to get out into the country [which is different to the bush]. Terry would buy a hobby-farm, *if I had the money. Just a few beef cattle 'cos they're less problem than sheep. Just to be surrounded by scrub, I like peace and quiet.* Wanda would like to live in the country with a big, big garden, *so I'd have my country place and city place. With lots of trees, I'd look after the garden, I like gardens, with lots of native trees that will bring the birds around, room for the dogs to run.* Sarah also wants to get out of the city, *get into the country and have more time for ourselves and recreation time together...*

Rhoda, who lives in a 'Housing Trust' house, said rather wistfully, *I would rather like to own my home, I don't really know why at this age.*

New environments – 'more travel'

To travel is the dream of many Australians. These women are no exception, with half of them mentioning travel as part of their dream. Although they were asked what they would do given no restrictions, several of the women still prefaced their comments with some reference to money. Other reasons given by the women for travel included visiting older relatives, curiosity about other cultures, to see more of Australia and integrate travel into their lives.

Well, yes I think I'd travel more, if I had money I'd travel more, lots of places. I still want to do that again that takes energy, but I still have great curiosity about little corners of the world and I'd like to go and look for myself. Winnie

Ohhhh, what would I be doing? If I had more money I'd like to travel. Go and visit, not live, there's no place like home. I'd like to see the other side of the world, what women are doing with their lives. See more people and get to know other cultures. Josy

... but it's [travel] planned with other activities in mind like a 50th wedding anniversary and that's been the motivation. So the world trip is being planned around that and we're saving so that we will have enough money for that ... Lynne

Apart from the money Helena is also concerned about whether she would be able to cope with travel. I want to go to Israel and I'm really tentative about it because of the money and just going I'd have to do different things, and it would take me away from my safe environment.

Dee already goes overseas every year but only in a very superficial style, spending three weeks somewhere, staying in all the best hotels and doing all the touristy things. So I haven't got the feel of other countries, so that would be quite nice.

Alice, Wanda and Mandy would like to travel more and think once you do start travelling you get itchy feet.

Mary who has only travelled with her family would like to travel on her own. I'd like to go somewhere and do what I want to do whereas I've only travelled within a family so when the children were young you have to go to all the places you know that'd keep them happy. And then when you travel with your husband he doesn't like to spend time just looking at shops or churches or whatever I like to look at. So that would be a time, that would be my next step in life.

Kate would like to develop a more integrated approach to her life which would include travelling while also doing workshops all around the place.

Patria wants to do lots more travelling around Australia, but is concerned getting older and not being *fit enough to do them*. And Rhoda would also like to travel *around Australia, and see something of the country*. Lindy thinks it is really important to visit her relatives in England '*cos now relatives are starting to die off and I think I want to get back there before it's too late*.

Meg is constrained by her partner Alex who is in a wheelchair in her ambitions to travel. *I want to go and travel and have a suitcase and go. Yes I would go, and it would be a lifetime experience rather than a tourist thing. Even if it was just round Australia. And I think that's the hardest thing because it's very hard for him to deal with the inconvenience of travel and in his mind he thinks I don't want to do it, it's much easier staying at home.*

Be more self-indulgent – 'more time to be with friends and to party'

I'd like to flit around with relationships, [laughter] I do, I'd still like my solid man at home, and I know the trade-offs for that, and I have chosen not to, but if that pull gets too strong I'll have to make a decision. Dee

I think I will take more time to be with friends and to party. Just to have nice quiet little gatherings and I'm starting that on Sunday ... I think I'd feel indulgent. Lynne

... but I'd like to do things more spontaneously. Like if someone asks you to go out for dinner and you have to think, when is the next pension day and can I do that or has the car got to be serviced or something. Rhoda

Mostly content – 'I like it the way it is'

I can't think, I've always thought if people said I like it the way it is how dull they were ... (laughter), and here I am thinking exactly the same thing. I can't think of any other way I would like it. Helena

But no, I don't think there's much that I want that I haven't got ... it might mean that I'm lacking in imagination! ... Patria

Two of the women had some specific 'things' they would like to do. Patria would like to see more of my grandchildren in Sydney. And Winnie would probably get some machinery in to do some of the work ... but basically I would be doing much the same I certainly wouldn't move away from Cherryville for all the money in the world.

SUMMARY

This final findings chapter expanded on the earlier proposition regarding the segmentation of the various concepts, including enjoyment, flow, health and leisure and has presented the women's responses to the questions 'how do you see your life now?' and 'what is your dream for the future?' Midlife appears to be regarded as a new stage, and embracing change and resisting the stereotypical view of midlife women as being 'over the hill' appear to be inherent for this group of women. It is a time when they are in the process of rethinking their patterns of health, leisure and enjoyment and composing and creating enjoyable lives for themselves. Some of the women commented on issues regarding ageing and feeling that time was running out and the need to make the most of their time. Others spoke about difficult and stressful occasions when they were not always able to enjoy themselves. The over-riding impression was – these women are actively choosing ways to live their lives which provide them with satisfaction, enjoyment, control and contentment. In the next chapter all the findings are discussed and it concludes with some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This study was designed to challenge both the negative stereotypical images of women in midlife as well as the segmented approach to understanding their lives. I was concerned about the lack of research and information undertaken by feminists regarding midlife women and their lived experience. Midlife was either ignored or presumed to be a stage dominated by menopause and a general deterioration of the body. As discussed in this chapter, to research the parts (such as body, health, work or leisure) of women's lives in isolation may not only reinforce societal notions of fragmentation of life but also may ignore the grounds upon which women construct their sense of self. The decision to use existential phenomenological methodology meant I had to set aside my feminist presuppositions when analysing the women's transcripts. Nevertheless, this methodology, because of the richness of the data, has enabled me to discuss feminist theories and draw feminist conclusions from the women's interviews.

The primary task the women in my research sample were asked to undertake was to describe an experience that they enjoyed. In other words to research three cardinal characteristics, midlife, women and enjoyable situations. The experience of enjoyment was chosen because it cuts across the artificial boundaries, between for example, work, free time and constraints that have traditionally been considered in leisure research; it also goes beyond artificial boundaries that have been drawn between health, leisure and work.

The findings from the participants in this study support the proposition that women in midlife are having enjoyable times, are not entirely at the mercy of their hormones, do not regret the end of their reproductive lives and are certainly not 'over the hill'. These women have shown they resist these stereotypes and also that many regard their lives as a whole, a 'tapestry' and not divided into separate segments, for example of health, leisure and work. They are questioning the traditional roles of wife and mother that women in their generation have been traditionally confined to, and those with children have found that, as the responsibilities and concerns of child-

rearing have diminished, they have more opportunities to follow their own desires and determine their own goals and lifestyle. Menopause is rarely seen as a negative experience and most of the women accepted it as a time when they have learned or are learning more about their own bodies. Their attitudes, on the whole, are positive about the changes as well as the freedom, and choice associated with stopping bleeding.

The many intersections and overlaps between enjoyment and flow that have emerged from the findings provide a comprehensive view of being, and living in midlife. Asking these women about their enjoyable experiences, rather than restricting the task by using the word leisure, has enabled other dimensions of their lives to become apparent and to be considered in the analysis. This has led to the conclusion that these midlife women are active agents in constructing their lives for the future and are in the act of composing enjoyable lives for themselves.

The first section of this final chapter responds to the research question(s) posed in Chapter Three and presents the major themes that have emerged from the women's accounts. This section begins with the concepts of leisure and health and the discussion of these two concepts demonstrates the difficulty of separating out the different aspects of women's lives. Enjoyment and flow themes are reviewed and provide a more integrated way of presenting the findings of midlife women's lived experience. The major themes are discussed in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework; it is not intended that every detail from the interviews be considered here. The significant findings regarding enjoyment, leisure and health and wellbeing are presented under the headings of the five essential features of the lifeworld – self, time, space, other people and the body. This section concludes with my contribution towards a new structure in which to view women in midlife.

The second section addresses issues that arose during the process of this research including suitability of the methodology, accountability to participants, topic constraints and my role as researcher.

The third and final section includes suggestions as to applications of the study and further research.

MIDLIFE WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES

Leisure

Do midlife women relate to the concept of leisure as it is constructed in Australian culture? Are their experiences related to popular notions of leisure?

As many feminists have previously stated (for example, Anderson 1975; Green *et al.* 1990; Henderson *et al.* 1996) leisure is an inappropriate, over-defined, complex, multi-layered concept, and needs re-configuring in order to incorporate women's experiences. The women in this study reflected the confusion about the concept of leisure and were often thoughtful and rather hesitant in their responses when asked what they understood by the word leisure. This perhaps indicated the ambivalence that many of them felt about leisure and its relationship to their own lives and experiences. In marked contrast, when describing their enjoyable experiences, there was a much more lively and energetic response. Hunter and Whitson's (1991) study of women in a small town in Canada also found that the women "spoke in two voices" (p. 219). These Canadian women could not relate to and had very little to say about the traditional concepts of leisure, but spoke quite freely about their lives and their pleasures. Leisure seems to be a term the women in my study do not strongly identify with, as when Kate said *leisure doesn't mean a lot for me ...* and when a few of the women described examples of what they understood to be leisure for themselves there was less apparent personal involvement compared with when they talked about enjoyment or flow.

The concepts of leisure and enjoyment did appear to be interchangeable, in many cases, despite the apparent inability of some women to identify with the word leisure (see Chapter Six, The dubious concept of leisure, p. 108). Some referred back to their enjoyable experiences, for example Alice, who had described 'going to Uni' and meeting up with her friends after lectures. Other women appeared to be thinking about more theoretical aspects such as the time factor and the work/leisure dichotomy in which leisure occurs in time specifically set aside for it, reflecting popular notions of leisure in Australian culture. Perhaps I set this up when I introduced the question; before I asked them how they 'saw' leisure, or what they understood by the word leisure, I reminded them about having talked about enjoyable experiences. There is a general consensus among the women that leisure is something you enjoy although enjoyment, as discussed later, appears to

encompass qualities other than 'being at leisure'. The way the women spoke about leisure reflected in the main the feminist view that, for women, leisure is an inappropriate concept.

The traditional view of leisure as being 'non-work time' was touched on by several of the women and indicated the difficulty they had when trying to come to terms with the traditional concepts of work and leisure in their lives. Lindy said *leisure doesn't need to be separate from work, I don't see it as the opposite to work, I see it as the opposite of tedium and boredom*. So, what is work? According to some of these women it is an enjoyable experience. If one enjoys work, is it leisure? Some light may be shed on this dilemma by the public/private sphere theories (Pateman 1988; Beasley 1994). For women to work in the public sphere they must take on a masculinist perspective of work, according to which work is difficult, tough and exhausting, and definitely not regarded as leisure. Similarly, women who do their housework in the private sphere find it difficult to acknowledge there is any leisure or enjoyment in this work. Many of the women in this study indicated that they enjoy working away from home – because of the social contact, the challenge of the job and the realisation that they have the necessary skills – which is contradictory to the accepted view of work in the public sphere. As Barbara said:

Work [paid] satisfied me in all those sorts of things, my time and pleasure ... It was all those things I think leisure is, it was stimulating and of course it was very people orientated...

While they have different reasons for working and their own individual way of being involved in work, they do speak of enjoying work. Another example that cuts across the traditional dichotomy was provided by Merry who, when she thought about how she enjoys gardening, was not sure whether she regarded it as work or leisure. The women who had returned to further education had different views as to whether they regard study as being leisure or work. For example Gloria said *she wouldn't call going back to study, leisure, as some other people might*, whereas Alice commented *going to Uni is leisure rather than work*.

Raven who is semi-retired and living with her female partner, found that in contrast to her earlier life as a wife and mother her whole life now is her leisure – the 'all in one' concept. This is how many women described their experience of leisure, whether they were in or out of the paid workforce. Leisure, for these women, appears to trouble (Butler 1990) the traditional concept of leisure and does not, as Wearing (1994) states,

signify non-work time, activity or experience or space, [but rather] it is resignified to mean personal spaces, physical and metaphorical, where women can explore their own desires and pleasures and perform acts which allow them to become women in their own right, to constitute diverse subjectivities and femininities which go beyond what women have been told they should be (p. 8).

Menopause

What impact does menopause have on midlife women's health? How does menopause affect their lives?

The bio-medical model of health is based on the understanding that there is a perfect physiological body and because middle-aged women's hormonal levels change from that ideal, this process of change has become a focus for intervention by the medical profession. As the comments and experiences of Greer (1991) and the women in Coney's (1991) study indicate, midlife women are not happy with the way they are treated by the medical profession – who view the body as an object to be tested and examined – and are exploring alternative methods. And, while acknowledging the various experiences of menopause and some of the less pleasant symptoms, midlife women are placing it in the context of their lives as a whole. The women who have resisted their doctor's prescriptions for HRT have become empowered to develop other ways to restore their general health and wellbeing.

The majority of the women in this study said they were not pre-occupied with menopause. They did not see it as a major upheaval in their life. Their attitude towards the changes in their bodies mostly entailed an acceptance of the process. Some had experienced difficult times, and feelings of their body being out of control. Others, however, commented that it was 'not a problem'.

Some difficulties did arise, however, when they felt the need to get advice and information; for some, problems occurred when they paid a visit to their doctor. As Meryn said *I dropped into my [powerless] patient/doctor role, very timorous*, and she became angry with herself for being persuaded to go on to HRT. Several women commented on the doctor's attitude towards them and a rather extreme case was Patty's experience. She recalled her doctor saying *you're a female, you're one of the sheep, don't question me*. Others were frustrated by the lack of reliable information available to enable them to make the most appropriate choices especially regarding the

issue of HRT. The women who visited a women's health centre found they were able to tell their stories and received thoughtful and useful information with which to make their decisions. Those who had experienced very few problems were taking control of their overall health by keeping physically active, watching their diet and also discussing and sharing their problems with other women.

The attitudes of lesbian women in this study provided another view of the issues around ageing and menopause. As Gale said *part of the thing about coming out as a lesbian and being a lesbian that fear of ageing diminishes a lot. It doesn't feel like a diminishing function.* And Jenny also found that because she chooses to live with a woman she thinks they will have similar concerns about menopause *and so will understand and that will be wonderful.* Both these women appear to recognise the importance of sharing their feelings and concerns with other women. Perhaps women in the lesbian community are not quite so affected by the stereotyped older woman image, although they do have to contend with homophobia in the wider community. Whether the lesbian community can also provide a better environment for women to have enjoyable lives is questionable and this study does not purport to address this particular issue.

Most of the women interviewed have come to the realisation that they can take control of their own ageing process and make choices that suit them; they are enjoying a restored sense of confidence in their own decision-making. The women's health networks are enabling women to access information that is reliable as well as offering a range of alternatives to consider.

Flow

Is Csikszentmihalyi's theoretical model of enjoyment, the concept of flow, relevant to this group of women?

The short answer to this is 'yes'. Although the statement about flow that was read to them was rather pedantic (see Chapter Seven, p. 148) and included a long list of the various factors involved in the flow state, most of the women identified with the overall description. When they were talking about their flow experience it was easy to listen to and the words just flowed too. I've noticed this before with other women. When they are talking about something they really enjoy and get involved in (a flow state?) they take themselves back to that time and re-live the experience. I have found that it

is also easier to process parts of the women's transcripts that deal with flow; the words flow logically and I can recall them without having to listen over and over again.

While there is no doubt that flow entails enjoyment, and it is rather artificial to separate the two, for this study I was interested to find out how midlife women relate to the flow concept by itself. Being 'in the flow' can mean being not so much concerned with the skills and challenges as simply 'being there'. By allowing the ebbing and flowing of the experience to take over the rational mind the flow experience can become, in some cases, a spiritual one. Patria identified with several aspects of the flow concept when she described her experience in Kakadu, including the sense of being involved, as *if in another world* and the challenge aspect because of the climb. She also spoke of the physical beauty of the Australian landscape and of spiritual aspects of the expedition, including a sense of awe about the history of thousands of years of Aboriginal habitation and uncertainty about the place of white 'man' in this landscape, aliens in a foreign land. The inclusion of spirituality in the meaning of flow adds an extra dimension to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975; 1988) original concept of flow. In a later work on the evolving self (1993) he discusses transcendence and the importance, in most cultures, of mental processes which he describes as spiritual (p. 239).

A 'flow lifestyle' was alluded to by Patty when she said *flow sounds like my daily life ... the flow is my lifestyle, it really is, I just wake up and go*. She appears to have developed a way of life where her everyday actions as well as her ability to be creative and enterprising have a flow quality, thus providing her with a life of flow. Winnie outlined a similar experience when she described the building of her laundry, *it was a late winter/spring of flow*.

Although the concept of flow was new to most of the women it appeared to capture their imagination and provide another way of regarding their lived experiences.

Enjoyment

How do midlife women enjoy themselves and what are the meanings of these experiences?

Enjoyment, for the women in this study, is revealed in the accounts of their experiences as taking delight or pleasure in what they are doing and creating the 'good life' for themselves. They found that enjoyable moments can crop

up anywhere and can be experienced when they are on their own, or with friends or family; they may occur for example, while reading a book in bed on a rainy day, having an intellectual discussion, playing with grandchildren, doing the ironing, gardening or walking in the bush. In these experiences enjoyment appears to be less structured than leisure. Patty endorses this meaning when she said *leisure is too structured, structured leisure time, everyone must conform.*

The participants' descriptions of enjoyable experiences showed that they were:

- experiencing different ways of enjoying their physical selves which also affects their emotional wellbeing;
- embracing change and reviewing their roles as carers, partners and mothers;
- developing greater confidence in themselves as midlife women.

Enjoying their physical selves

Although physical activity is not essential for enjoyment, the importance of being physically active was mentioned or alluded to in all of the women's descriptions of enjoyable experiences, and for many of them it was a dominant aspect. The joy of physical movement was evident in their verbal accounts of their experiences and also in the non-verbal body language that accompanied those descriptions. One woman's face 'lit up' and showed her increased excitement, she spoke more quickly and her hands moved around to help explain her experience on a canoeing trip.

Several of the women described the enjoyment they gained from being aware of their physicality; from feeling the strength in their muscles and the coordination of their bodies (see Chapter Seven under theme, A sense of physical wellbeing, p. 135). In her book *Women in Midlife*, Potter (1991) included statements from women on the importance of daily exercise for their general health and wellbeing, for example walking, to enable them to get time with their husbands, or of doing yoga for increased flexibility and the feeling of being calm and centred afterwards. Several women in the study mentioned these aspects. They also discussed the mental and emotional benefits they gained when engaged in physical activity, whether it was meeting spiritual needs or invoking a peaceful state of mind (see Chapter Seven under theme, Mental and emotional wellbeing, p. 138). This awareness enabled the women to gain further understanding of the functioning of their physical body and the enjoyment they experienced from

the body/mind correlation. Unfortunately, while the connections between enjoyment and physical exercise seem to be strong, as evidenced in this study, there is very little research that investigates this particular aspect in any age cohort.

The media, as well as promoting the health benefits of physical activity, also place increasing pressure on women as they grow older to maintain their youthful looks and keep slim. This has become a strong marketing ploy for the beauty and leisure business world (Featherstone 1982, in Hargreaves 1994). Such goals were not apparently important to these participants, none of the women mentioned losing weight as a reason for walking, canoeing or swimming; rather feelings of happiness, "feeling good in myself", "having time to think and dream" and the sensation of "physically buzzing" were emphasised.

Embracing change and reviewing roles

As Friedan (1993) states, "... the essence of life is change. With every new adventure you change. Without change, the whole organism dies" (p. 614). Because of the physiological marker of menopause and other changes that occur, such as children becoming independent, midlife women have some clear prompts to reassess their lives and begin to think about their future. This 'midlife reckoning experience' can become a "waking up ... a fitting metaphor for midlife change" (Vickers & Thomas 1993, p. 2).

Change is an integral part of women's lived experience. Women have always lived with disruptions and discontinuities because of the multiple roles expected of them (Long & Porter 1984; Fodor & Franks 1990). In making the adaptations that most women have needed to make to the demands of reproduction, including those associated with menarche, pregnancy, child-care, and menopause, they have learnt to do many things at once, to improvise and to accommodate new and different circumstances as they have grown older. Their awareness of their ability to adapt can become a valuable resource and help them to make changes and adjust to their present circumstances. Also, for many women, as the roles change from being wives and mothers to more independent women, they have the opportunity to rethink previous behaviour patterns and to be creative about what it means to be thinking of themselves as individuals and not as part of a couple.

The women in the study have made many and various changes and are choosing to move away from their previous patterns and roles. This rethinking appears to involve learning about their own needs and ceasing to be so restricted by the roles including wife and mother. Winnie commented that once she *stopped being a wife*, and her children ceased to be central to her own living situation she was able to establish an enjoyable life as a single, independent person. Gladys and Gloria also acknowledged the importance of being accepted not as a part or half of a couple (whole), but rather as individuals in their own right, and not always feeling responsible for others. As Gloria said about the canoeing trip she enjoyed, *the importance of being there as myself and so that was related to my life of independence too*, and Gladys liked her square dancing group because *it's not into couple stuff*. While many of the women expressed their delight in their changing roles and independence, some also acknowledged feelings of guilt when enjoying themselves. Raven sums up this concern when she said:

one is actually not supposed to enjoy things one is supposed to get on and do and therefore there is a slight feeling of guilt if you're actually enjoying something, it connotes selfishness.

Those women who have become grandmothers have found a new role that they enjoy. Spending time with grandchildren can be a very pleasurable experience. About the role of grandmother-hood, Wearing (1996b) asks whether it is a "source of pleasure" in older age for women or does it entail "a continuation of the nurturing, caring expectations placed on women from an early age?" (p. 4). She found that for the younger grandmothers much satisfaction was gained from interaction with their grandchildren, especially if it was on an occasional basis – but that when regular and lengthy periods of childcare were involved it became tiring and hard work, and the fun and enjoyment diminished. Several 'grandmothers' in this study commented on the joys of taking grandchildren to the zoo or for a ride in an old DC3, a walk along the river or feeding the ducks. Gladys concurred with some of Wearing's findings when she said she is *a bit like the usual grandmother, I'm happy to see them, and I'm happy to see them go ... I enjoy spending the time with them that I wouldn't have done with my own children*. These women are finding the experience of grandmother-hood is giving them a new perspective on life. Perhaps seeing through a child's eyes reawakens their own childhood days of being curious and exploring new places and ideas as well as remembering the freedom associated with being a

child. This reawakening could be the motivation to make changes in these women's lives and provide new possibilities for their future.

Developing greater confidence in themselves as midlife women.

Several of the women commented on the pleasure and enjoyment they felt in becoming more confident and developing feelings of being successful and powerful (see Chapter Seven, under theme Feeling confident, p. 147). These women have survived the various traumas of their younger years; perhaps the recognition of this, in midlife, gives them the confidence that they can continue to not only survive but thrive for the next forty years. The realisation also that they have the courage to initiate change on their own, and take risks to achieve the desired goals, has set them on the path toward feeling empowered and in control of their lives.

Many of the participants in this study appear to be choosing to be independent women in their own right. This does not necessarily mean they are divorced, single or living on their own, but rather these women are preferring to learn and develop their own ways of living. Gale said *I like going out with a lover, but I also like going out with friends and not feeling coupled*. For others this can be a rather daunting prospect, especially those who have been used to relying on family members for company. It often means plucking up the courage to take the first step on their own. This new experience may entail doing things by themselves – going for a walk, reading, doing craft work, going out socially on their own but in the company of others, having time to themselves, or learning new skills. The women in this study have found that by choosing to be involved in a range of different activities they have developed confidence in their ability to enjoy these experiences.

Enjoyment, leisure and wellbeing

Although there are links between enjoyment and leisure, there is a sense that leisure is more structured as when the women spoke about leisure time and work/leisure. The concept of leisure, as it is regarded by these women, does not 'fit' the views of their lives where they are more inclined to 'see' their lives as a whole and not separated out. Enjoyment is less structured, where the woman can enjoy herself at any time, place or space with or without others. As Wearing (1994) comments, using leisure in a broader

context, "it is possible in my daily life ... to create leisure spaces which restore a sense of self-worth and autonomy ..." (p. 13).

The findings from this study provides evidence that a healthy state for midlife women, according to those interviewed, seems to involve, not taking themselves too seriously, having fun, being daring, breaking out of their given roles and not caring what their neighbours or children think. These women indicate that midlife can be a time of increased feelings of wellbeing. They are becoming energised and empowered by choosing to resist the more structured views of society regarding leisure and realise they have the potential to live enjoyable lives.

THE LIFEWORLD

In order to re-connect this last chapter with the phenomenological view of the lifeworld I now discuss the significant findings regarding leisure, enjoyment flow and health, under the headings of the five essential features of the lifeworld – self, the body, time, space, and other people. These five categories have been considered as belonging to the fundamental structure of the lifeworld and they can be differentiated but not separated. In other words it is difficult if not impossible to discuss one of the features without bringing in the other aspects. The phenomenological approach facilitates many connections through the features of the lifeworld and enables a more holistic view to be achieved, therefore this methodology proved indispensable for the analysis of the findings in this study. The five features have already emerged as themes and or sub-themes in the findings chapters but they are now brought together in a slightly different form in order to address the question, what is the world like for these women when it presents itself as enjoyable?

Selfhood

In general women's sense of self is very much centred around being able to make and then maintain affiliations and relationships (Miller 1986). In accommodating themselves to others and focusing on relationships, however, women may neglect "building a sense of themselves as distinct and valuable individuals" (Vickers & Thomas 1993, p. 4). Midlife women may therefore have a strongly connected sense (Wine 1982) of themselves in terms of their relationship with others as daughter, wife and/or mother. It is not surprising therefore that some women have not developed their own sense of themselves nor do they know what they want to do for fun or

enjoyment. The realisation of this situation may cause anxiety, anger and or pain which may then provide the motivation required by women to reassess their position, and to change the way they live out the remainder of their lives. Meryn reflected this notion when she said *as I've got older I've become more self-centred and do things I want to do for myself, and feel good about that, and that's been great.*

Some women have realised they do not need to be so responsible for others and have become more concerned with themselves and their own needs. As Mary said *I do exactly what I want to do and not have anyone else relying on me. I can be really selfish now.* And Gale gets enjoyment and satisfaction from writing which she finds is *very much a self-actualisation experience.* While Barbara, when discussing flow said *with life experiences you learn to know your self.* Being in the flow state also provided several women with the experience of losing one's self, where, as Lynne said *I can completely lose myself [when I'm doing] a jigsaw or a crossword puzzle.* Mary and Merry also talked about this phenomena of losing themselves when they are totally engaged in an activity.

An enjoyable world, in terms of self, appears to mean: midlife women making their own choices; not having feelings of guilt about the responsibility for others and being selfish; forgetting about everything else, and becoming totally involved in the experience.

The body

This feature has been taken as meaning awareness and sensitivity to our own physical bodies (our own lived body) rather than in relation to how others regard our bodily presence. By choosing to use this 'definition' I have placed 'the body' in a different context which is more connected to the first feature, selfhood. Midlife women's experience of the body has traditionally been closely connected with menopause. The ageing body is often regarded as problematic and out of control especially when the physical signs of growing old appear, for example outward signs of grey hair, wrinkles, sagging breasts and hormonal disruptions. Although menopause was discussed by the women in this study, the main focus of this research was concerned with enjoyment. The women's responses therefore reflected this aspect and for the most part menopause became 'just part of the ageing process' and a 'time of ripening' rather than being a dominant feature.

Many of the women described the importance of enjoying their physicality and being in tune with their bodies. As Mary said, *my body feels good when I'm active, preferably outside*, and Jenny and Gale expressed enjoyment about *doing anything physical, or feeling grounded and good in myself when I'm exercising*. There were various physical activities that enabled these women to have an enjoyable experience. These activities included walking which has been mentioned before as being enjoyable for more than half the women as well as canoeing, swimming or dancing.

The separation of body and mind, where the mind denies the existence of the body does not appear to be evident in these women's lives. The opposite, as in the connection between body and mind, was more often the case. Some of the women expressed resentment when decisions about their bodies with regard to menopause were made by the male-dominated medical profession. The doctors assumed by these actions that the women's bodies were separated from their minds and therefore the women would have no relevant input or feelings regarding any decision made. Being 'in tune' with their bodies was an important concept for these women. Margie, who swims regularly commented *I always feel very much at peace and happy, provided the water is warm enough. I have often thought it is a sort of meditative experience*, further indicating the body/mind reflexivity.

An enjoyable world, in terms of the body, would appear to recognise the body/mind connection in all aspects and include : being physically active; having a comfortable relationship with the body and being in tune with it; taking care of and being in control of the body.

Time and space

These two features are so closely intertwined that it appeared more appropriate to present them together. Time is an integral part of our lives. Lived time is the time that speeds up when we enjoy ourselves, or slows down when we are feeling bored or anxious. Lived time is our way of relating to time, our temporal way of being in the world. Although behaviour and action take place in the present, the here and now, it is planned or projected in the past and it can be endlessly recollected in the future once it has happened. Awareness of time can be lost in the flow state, as when Gloria said *you lose time* and Winnie *lost all sense of time* when she was building her laundry, but time can also be a form of control where,

as Wanda said, *I go with the flow to a certain point and then time hits me and I shut it off.*

Being in midlife also highlights another aspect of the awareness of time. Many of the women have become more conscious of the passage of time, as they get older and the need to stop postponing their lives and make the most of their time. Gloria reflects this need for making the most of the time available when she commented about the affect on her of her brother's death, *that swings you around, I mean Hey, this is your life mate.* And Meg said *I've still got forty years to do all this and I'm really determined.* The issues concerned with establishing their own future were also raised in this respect and the need for these women to work towards developing a secure future. Meryn mused about the prospect of going on the pension and how she would manage when she said *OK you'll go on the pension, you won't have so much money, but what will you have to do without? And there was not very much I could think about [that I would need].*

Time for enjoyment and leisure is linked to time for self, unobligated time. This attitude was repeated by many of the women the need to have *time for/to myself*, where this time was one's own and unpressing. An extension of this also involves space, having the time and space to enjoy life. This illustrates the interdependency of these two lifeworld features. Lived space is 'felt' space, where the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. Gale, a single parent with two young children demonstrates this point when she said,

it's a real struggle following my own desires reading what I want to read and writing what I want to write, finding the time and space for that. Realistically that struggle is going to continue for a few years, and at times I feel I don't get enough time and space for me.

Many of the women have tended to be surrounded by others, in particular family members (this again illustrates the connectedness of the lifeworld features, 'other people') and the experience of having time to be alone and have their own space is one they have come to take pleasure in. Walking alone provides many of these women with an opportunity to get time and space for themselves (see Chapter Seven under theme, A sense of physical wellbeing, p. 135). Alice has worked out ways to be on her own and chooses to stay at home when her husband *goes out bush. So it works out quite well. So that's the way I get my own space.* Margie described a situation which provided her with a moment of absolute happiness:

I was sitting overlooking a calm, sheltered bay and again it was very quiet there was no-one else around ... and I was looking across this lovely water with its

vibrant colours, I did this little painting I was quite happy with it, and just while I was doing it and capturing this beautiful scene I just felt, I think I experienced a moment of perfect happiness, just indescribable. [very animated facial expression and voice]

These two women's comments emphasise their need for personal space, where the space around them is deliberately left unfilled so that they feel comfortable. Gloria's comment illustrates the process involved in achieving another aspect of space and time. She said,

some Sundays when I know I'm not likely to see anyone and I haven't planned anything. For the first two hours I feel like a social outcast, a feeling of purposelessness and then I drift into this state – yes see that's the drifting into a state of timelessness and just contentment within yourself.

There is also the notion of a breathing space, where leisure is *letting go* (Gale), or *opting out* (Sarah), thus enabling these women to also get time and space for a leisurely experience. The flow state can also provide a meditative space where *a sense of peace and harmony* (Alice) can be experienced.

An enjoyable world, in terms of time and space, would appear to mean: having choice and control over their own time and space; seizing the day, and making the most of the next stage of their lives; choosing whether to be or not to be involved in some family/people gatherings; being in a state of timelessness; finding a meditative space for an enjoyable experience.

Other People

This feature concerns the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space we share with them. Although women have always shared information and experiences in the private sphere (over the back fence, or having a cup of tea in the kitchen) that sharing has been regarded by society as merely 'women's gossip' and not taken seriously, although such sharing has been the way some women have met some of their need for relationship. While relationships with friends and family may provide a certain amount of personal enjoyment it can also constrain personal freedom. Now in midlife perhaps they have the opportunity to see further than their backyard and to realise that there are occasions where they may have this 'comfortable' feeling of relationship in a wider range of settings with other women. Also doing things that take them away from the traditional roles of shoring up other family members to the neglect of their own self.

The women in my study, as they reflect on their lives and think about what they really want to do, are choosing to make changes in the way they relate to others. Lindy said,
now I feel I've got more of a choice about the things I want to do and if people ask me to go somewhere or do something, I can decide whether I really want to or not.

Hunter and Whitson (1991) cite examples of women enjoying sharing pleasure with and facilitating the pleasure of others, particularly family members, but also, becoming frustrated and unhappy because of the lack of opportunities to develop themselves. In contrast, some of the midlife women in my study appear to have come to the realisation that their traditional roles of being carers and of being responsible for others have changed and as Margie said *I've been postponing the rest of my life long enough*. These women are exploring different options and making choices about who they want to spend time with.

Many of the women mentioned the enjoyment they get from spending time with other women – whether that be through having an intellectual discussion, walking in the bush, or being with others at a camp or in other social environments – choosing to take the time to explore and develop their own sense of themselves as individuals. There has been little research on women's friendships despite there being ample evidence in everyday life of their importance to the women concerned (Green & Woodward 1990). A body of research is being developed which acknowledges the value of 'women only' wilderness experiences (Nanschild 1996; Fox 1996). These feminist studies emphasise the value of these experiences where women find support, trust, openness, freedom and the opportunity to be out of traditional roles in the company of other women. They build on awareness of the personal as well as the political importance of women's support groups, a feature of the second wave of feminism. These groups have continued throughout the last twenty plus years in many guises such as reading groups, walking groups or discussion groups where women come together on a regular basis to enjoy the company of other women as well as having a focus for their meeting.

An enjoyable world, in terms of other people, would appear to mean: choosing or not choosing to spend time with friends or family; spending time with other women whether it be in a social group, an outdoor activity or an intellectual discussion group; being regarded as an individual and independent person.

In summary, an enjoyable world for midlife women is primarily concerned with choice. The importance of having choice and control over –their own time and space, who they will spend time with and decisions about their physical bodies will enable them to live enjoyable lives. These women are in various stages of transition, where they are becoming more aware of their own needs and are in a process of exploring new options for the future. The final segment of this section further expands this significant factor of choice and control into midlife women composing their own enjoyable lives.

COMPOSING ENJOYABLE LIVES

Midlife women could be seen as being in a privileged situation, in contrast to women generally who have been subjected to social pressure and assumptions which convey the message that time and selfhood were not their own. Furthermore, it appears the very circumstance of being at midlife, where choices can begin to open, provides women with the opportunity for living enjoyable lives.

The growing awareness shown by the women in this study indicates that they are 'women enough' (Walker 1992) to chose what they want to do and are not being confined by the cultural norms of the society in which they live. It appears that it is not until women are freed, to a large extent, from the obligations of being responsible for others and the double work shift that they can make this choice. Interestingly this shift of perspective also seems to occur, to a degree, with women who have not had the particular roles of wives and/or mothers. It is almost as though they take on aspects of women's caring and wifely roles and suppress their own wants and needs to fit into the cultural norm. For example Jenny, although she had not had children, said, *I haven't always given myself a lot of time for socialising but now there does seem to be a change occurring. It's happened now and I just happen to be in my forties.* Certainly the role of being a prospective bearer of children has some effect on all women, and perhaps it is not until the 'biological clock' runs out that they can feel entirely free of this. To take the clock analogy a step further, perhaps it is also the setting off of an alarm clock that provides the motivation for midlife women to wake up and start creating a new life (Vickers & Thomas 1993).

The majority of the women in this study appeared to be actively choosing to have fulfilled, contented, enjoyable lives. They are realising they now have

more choices and have learnt from past experiences what suits them, and now *they don't do things that [they] don't want to do* (Alice). An awareness of her own role in shaping a good life was demonstrated by Rhoda's comment, *generally life is pretty good, but it is still only what you make it*. Although Gale, who has two young children, realises she does *not get enough time and space for me*, Sandy says *I've got it together reasonably well and a sense of myself ... my life is now good*.

Enjoyment and flow appear to have entered into many aspects of these women's lives. These midlife women are taking risks and making creative choices that lead towards becoming a person in their own right. The women's increased confidence is enabling them to 'see' themselves in a different light and make their own decisions and choices and are not so concerned with whatever *will the neighbours think?* (Patty). These midlife women are composing a life for themselves that will stand them in good stead for the second half of their lives. Sandy reflects this when she commented, *My life now is good I'm doing the things I like to do*, The following quote from Kate sums up this 'new woman',

I'm very seldom bored, I live my life, taking a lot of challenges, I'm sort of on the edge a lot with the things I do, but that's part of the excitement ... I generally live with a real sense of excitement about being alive.

The act of composing a life entails thinking about the future. When I asked women about their dream of the future, or their wish list, many responded with a range of different possibilities but for some it was almost as though they had not really thought about this question to any great extent. The interview provided an opportunity for the women to think and talk about their future.

Travel was on most of their lists. This is probably related to the 'down-under' syndrome where most Australians feel the need to visit other parts of the world, especially Europe and more recently Asia. Several women said they would like to change their living arrangements and live more as independent women. The importance of becoming more self-indulgent and of taking more time for themselves was a common theme. Dee would *like to flit around with relationships*, and Lynne said, *I think I will take more time to be with friends and to party ... I think I'd feel indulgent*. The opportunity to talk about their enjoyable experiences in the interview may have been the catalyst to start the women thinking about their lives from a new perspective. Allowing themselves to begin to dream about an ideal future, with no restrictions, perhaps encouraged the women to wonder what

possibilities there may be for living an enjoyable life. The concept of actively composing their lives could be an increasingly conscious reality.

In conclusion, midlife appears to be the time of their lives when these women can really 'see' and thus gain insight into themselves and their lifeworlds. There is also the realisation that they can take control and make choices about roles and lifestyles and are in the process of evolving and changing. They are aware of their mortality and that this is not a dress rehearsal – so they had better not waste time; as Gloria said *life is too short for shit*. They appear to be aware of the need to find ways of enjoying themselves and to *stop postponing their lives* (Margie). As well, they alluded to a sense of freedom where they could be in the 'flow' state thus enjoying the spaces (Wearing 1994) they have created in their lives for themselves.

The findings have shown these women resisting the negative cultural stereotypes and attitudes towards midlife women. They are also providing different models of women (postmodern women?) who have a new self-confidence to challenge "the givens of their existence" (Wearing 1994, p. 3) and are prepared to be selfish in their needs and wants for themselves. Mary summarised this when she said *I'm doing exactly what I want to do and not having anyone else relying on me. I can be really selfish now ...* Midlife women, by celebrating their freedom from prescribed roles of mothers, daughters and wives, are forging a different vision for ageing women. They are daring to be different and finding pleasure and enjoyment in doing new things that post or peri menopausal zest that Margaret Mead mentions (quoted in Bateson 1989, p.28). These women are choosing to compose and live enjoyable lives.

My own journey (see the Preface) which led me to choose the topic for this research, and to develop a theory that encompasses midlife women's lived experiences in a holistic rather than a fragmented way, resonates with the conclusions drawn from the women in this study. I too, like the midlife women in this study, am in the act of composing an enjoyable life for myself as I move into the next stage after paid work, a life that is fulfilling and incorporates both physical and psycho-social aspects of being in the world.

ISSUES ARISING IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

As explained in the Preface I have always regarded myself as a feminist activist. Twenty years ago when I took on the role of university lecturer my

'mission' was to continue to enable women to become empowered by attending to their own health (physical, mental and emotional) and wellbeing needs. While being concerned with some of the theoretical underpinnings related to issues of health and wellbeing I was not actively extending the feminist agenda with regard to the issues of leisure. The challenge for me in this study was to become involved in doing qualitative research around this issue and to develop a theoretical framework to situate my findings.

I chose to use a phenomenological method of research because it enabled me to access women's lifeworlds. This interactive approach acknowledges the importance of listening to the participants' own voices and their accounts of their experiences. However, I was concerned by the fact that while phenomenological data provides descriptions of the experiences of life as it is lived, the phenomenological perspective does not appear to take account of difference (previously discussed in Chapter Four). There seems to be an implicit assumption amongst phenomenologists that there could be a lifeworld unaffected by gender, so that genderedness is not an essential characteristic of lifeworlds (Ashworth 1996; Giorgi 1986). Gender is simply not addressed. This ignores or contradicts research by feminist theorists who stress the impact of gender differences on all aspects of women's lived experience. Gender is the backdrop against which women's daily lives are played out (Burr 1998; Wearing 1996). The comments made by the women in my interview data indicates how their lived experiences are affected by their gender roles. For example Winnie commented about her life now she is divorced, "the biggest difference is stopping being a wife". Her experiences before she 'stopped being a wife' were defined by society's gendered expectations of marriage and its constraints. But now she has become an independent women living her 'own' life and no longer perceives herself in the gendered role of 'wife'.

Despite its shortcomings, a phenomenological perspective has enabled me to explore in more detail five key aspects of women's lifeworlds: self, body, time, space and relationships with other people. My interpretation of the women's accounts has enabled me to illuminate features of their lifeworlds which relate to self-awareness: knowledge of self; bodily awareness, how women experience their bodies; certain aspects of time, for example access to 'spare' time; space, own space in the home; and relationality, relationships with other people. These are all heavily gendered and form part of feminist understandings of women's lived experience. These important features of

the lifeworld constitute one of the main research agendas for feminists in the 1990s (Miller 1990; Grosz 1994; Gray 1992).

The research process itself has been a challenge. I found interviewing women about their lives and how they enjoy themselves was not difficult, I have been working with women in both my personal and professional life for many years, but this time my position was as a research student who is a lecturer and also a midlife woman. Although the subject matter was familiar to me, I found there was a conflict between firstly my student role, where I was eager to hear what the women had to say, secondly my lecturer role where sometimes I felt I knew all about it, and thirdly my personal position where I kept identifying with many of the stories and comments that were made. Because the methodology was informed by interpretive phenomenology based on feminist principles, where in the analysis of the interviews an understanding of the particular phenomenon of the participant's life world is gained by bracketing out the researcher's own assumptions, the latter two roles required constant vigilance on my part.

The relationship between the researcher and the researched and the influence of the researcher on the research process as a whole has become a major focus amongst feminist researchers for example Stanley & Wise (1993) and Reinharz (1992). As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the researcher is part of the encounter and the effect she has on the way the descriptions of the women's experiences are related needs to be considered. About one third of the women in this study had been in my women's studies classes and therefore knew me in my role as a lecturer. Although I like to think they regarded me first as another woman and then in my professional role nevertheless this is not necessarily the case and may have had some bearing on the way they responded. By choosing to have women from women's studies as some of the participants, a more wide ranging discussion on some of the issues was envisaged. These women have studied feminist theories and have had the opportunity to discuss the application of these theories to their own lives as well as to social policies. Because of this experience these women presumably had a better awareness and an opinion of their position as women in Australian society. This study is about the lived experiences of the thirty midlife women who were interviewed and does not purport to be about all midlife women. The findings and conclusions therefore are peculiar to them, although there may be some applicability to this cohort in general.

This study has not taken into account the different patterns and relationships of Aboriginal midlife women for the following reasons. As a non-Aboriginal I would not attempt to conduct research which focused on indigenous women because of ethical issues illustrated by the following observation: 'Non-Aboriginals must understand their cultural and ethical limitations in studying, researching and writing about blacks' (Huggins & Saunders 1993, p. 63). Although many white academics continue to hold the ethnocentric view that they know best (Felton & Flanagan 1993), the lived experiences of white women cannot be assumed to be the norm. Sensitive aspects of culture, for example, traditional ceremonies and 'the dreaming' (Aboriginal people's originating story, the period of creation which is associated with a totem and kinship relations and intricately connected to the land), which is an essential part of Aboriginal life may not be shared or discussed with white researchers. However more recently, with increased involvement of Aboriginal women themselves in academic research, there are more studies being proposed and undertaken by Aboriginal women about Aboriginal women. This work by Aboriginal academics will help redress the lack of understanding and knowledge about such indigenous people.

The methods for generating the sample have been outlined in Chapter Five. The volunteers, all resident in South Australia included: 21 Australian born; 7 born in the United Kingdom; 1 born in Greece and 1 born in Sweden. No Aboriginal or Asian women volunteered. Although the methods were successful in attracting a sufficient number of participants, I acknowledge the limitations of the method. It did not enable differences of, for example, race, class and sexual identity to be fully investigated.

Are there any constraints about discussing aspects of the subject? One example of this is that very few women talked about sexual intimacy as enjoyment. Does this mean that sexual intimacy is not enjoyable? or is it more likely to mean that it was not deemed appropriate or socially acceptable in this context to discuss it with me? In terms of this study, the women appeared to be honest in their responses, although sometimes their non-verbal behaviour indicated self-consciousness or perhaps embarrassment.

As my research developed, I became more aware of my need to communicate the findings to others including midlife women themselves, academic women in the health and leisure disciplines as well as women

working in the community. Throughout the time I have been involved in researching and writing this thesis I have given talks to community health workers, papers at women's studies, health and leisure conferences and also shared my thoughts and ideas with colleagues, friends and family.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has demonstrated the need to research aspects of women's lives as a whole. To research aspects of women's lives in isolation reinforces societal notions of the fragmentation of life and may ignore the grounds upon which midlife women construct their sense of self. Morrison (1992), in his study of the professional caring relationship in nursing, also found what had emerged most powerfully was the significance of caring for the whole person. This segmentation of the different components of people's lives does not allow for the interactive processes involved in composing a life.

There are numerous research possibilities related to midlife women living enjoyable lives. I have identified a few of these in the following:

Interview women about their enjoyable experiences from specific cohorts, for example - women who have never been wives and/or mothers; women who have left partners/husbands and are living alone/independently - lesbian couples - different cultural backgrounds - Aboriginal women (which would need to be done by Aboriginal women researchers and which might produce unpublishable 'restricted' materials).

Research women's views and experiences of the second half of their lives, including retirement. Some of these women who are Second Wave Feminists, and have done the 'double shift' and been in paid work for most of their lives, are now contemplating redundancy and retirement. What are they looking for when they take the time to think about the future? How do they manage and plan for the next stage of their lives - an enjoyable creative 'retirement'? Have professional women who have established strong networks in their work places also established other community-based networks to 'see them through' the rest of their lives? Financial advice and strategic plans are readily available from financial institutions and private consultants but what financial plans have they developed? As these women become unemployed are there sufficient facilities and opportunities in the

community for this 'different' cohort of women to continue to lead healthy, enjoyable lives?

In sum, there is a long agenda of research possibilities for feminist, health and leisure scholars to explore. There is also a sense of urgency regarding these issues, particularly those concerning retirement. They have an immediate application to many women now and in the very near future. The research needs to be relevant, applicable and available for use by all women.

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1 Where possible I have included first names rather than initials. This strategy was, and is still used by women's studies lecturers to enable the visibility of women authors.

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APPENDIX A

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This overview provides a brief background of 'white' women's history, and some of the key developments which have led to the current position of these women in Australia today. The word 'women' in the text will only refer to white anglo-Australian women unless otherwise specified. Although Australian feminist historians have researched various aspects of women's lives and their position in society there are very few references made to women's involvement in leisure and physical activity. Therefore this historical chapter has had limited resources but it does incorporate as many relevant points regarding women's leisure as possible. The main focus is on Australia although references and comparisons are made, where appropriate, to other Western countries mainly Britain (the colonising nation), New Zealand, and the United States of America. It outlines some of the main stages in the history of Australia that have effected how women live in the 1990s. There is also an overview of the political and theoretical context in which Australian feminism has been developed.

MIDLIFE WOMEN: THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT.

This study is about midlife women living in the 1990s in the city of Adelaide, in South Australia, one of the eight states and territories of Australia. Australia is a very large country (approximately 35 times the combined size of England and Scotland) with a relatively sparse population (17,661,500). Australia's twenty largest cities hold 65% of the population in 0.1% of the land area (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996). The living style for most urban Australians is similar to those in other cities in the western world. Australia has a reputation for being the country of long white beaches, bronzed Aussies, cricket, football, racing and beer. It is a very masculine image that has traditionally been portrayed both within the country and overseas. South Australia is not regarded as one of the premier states and it is probably only known internationally for its wineries. It is also 'the driest state in the driest continent'.

The Bicentenary of white settlement in Australia in 1988 provided a focus for examining and questioning the national identity and image of Australian

people. At this time over one in five Australians were born overseas, the vast majority of these were from the United Kingdom but with an increasing number from Asian and Pacific countries. Race, sexism and cultural difference became recognised categories in terms of the national identity with the Federal government developing policies to outlaw discrimination in these areas. Despite the work done by minority groups to achieve these changes the dominant culture in Australia is, as Pettman (1992) has stated:

white, English-speaking and probably male, although nowadays some recognition may be given to others - Aborigines, migrants, and women often seen as alternative categories, each with an ambiguous relationship to being Australian (p. 8).

In 1788 the continent of Australia was claimed as a British possession. Governor Phillip, by making this proclamation, was implementing the principle of *terra nullius* - unoccupied country (Garton 1989). This meant that the Aborigines who had lived in Australia for over 50,000 years were not considered as inhabitants of the island continent. Therefore it was not deemed necessary to negotiate treaties with the indigenous population. The outcome of this declaration has led to two different histories of Australia since colonisation, the first being that of the original inhabitants, who see their history as one of 'invasion, conquest and the dispossession of Aboriginal people' (Pettman 1992, p. 1) by white colonisers from Britain and the second, the more recent immigrants who were intent on making Australia a nation which was patriarchal, white and Anglo.

The history of white Australia officially began in 1788 when the First Fleet arrived with settlers from Britain. The majority of these settlers were male and more than half of them were convicts. Over the period from 1788 to 1841, New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land (later named Tasmania) became the 'dumping ground' for more than 145,000 convicts, 15% of these were women (Dixson 1976). Women convicts were regarded as fulfilling only one function in the penal colony that of providing sexual gratification for the men and during this time "almost all women were categorised as whores - or 'damned whores'" (Summers 1975, p. 267). The few women that were not in this category were the wives and daughters of the officers and officials who were governing the colony. In the first 100 years of settlement, 1788-1888, because of the high number of single young men and the absence of viable choices (Mathews 1984) white women's lives were 'ordered' by the necessity to marry. These colonial wives did all the household chores, raised children and also, in some areas, farm work and the notion of leisure was probably inapplicable to them (Allen 1989). After the deportation of convicts from Britain concluded in 1841,

Australia was settled by various groups of people including single young men as private passengers looking for adventure, explorers and gold seekers, also family groups and assisted emigrants who were bound for South Australia, a free colony (Alexander 1989) and a planned settlement of families and young working class men and women from England.

Prior to the depression of the 1890s a bourgeois society flourished in urban Australia (Smith 1988). The large land claims that were made and the discovery of gold ensured great financial wealth for some men. Their wives became the forced bearers of culture and 'took refuge in stereotypical idealisations of 'gentlemen' and 'ladies' and in a cult of 'ultra-respectability' (Walter 1989; Dixson 1986). Veblen, in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899 [1957]), suggests the wives of these ambitious men were to be an indicator of "vicarious leisure to be supported in idleness by [an] owner" (p. 56). In order to show they were not involved in productive labour they developed an array of feminine accomplishments for example, flower arranging, singing, sketching and arranging parties, which maintained them in the home, the preserve of women. Also, according to Veblen's theory, they forced their bodies into tight-fitting corsets to show they were not involved in any manual work. Veblen saw the corset as an archetypal example of the fundamental irrationality of conspicuous consumption. The symbolic power which it represents is often paid for by the physical disfigurement and ruined health of the wearer. (Rojek 1995, p. 77).

Although Veblen was writing from a North American perspective it would appear that this indication of women's idleness (corsets and feminine accomplishments) which served to show off the wealth of the women's husbands was also applicable in the United Kingdom. As Hargreaves (1994), writing about this period says:

Lavish, extravagant and restrictive clothes were tangible symbols of a life of leisure, but caused women discomfort and sometimes illness, and restrained them from performing any but the smallest and meanest of movements (p. 52).

These assumptions about the different natures and functions of the 'leisured class' (Veblen 1899) of men and women, were imported wholesale to Australia from Britain and leisure also became the "privilege of the privileged" and became established as a "commodity of conspicuous consumption, a frivolous item in the mainstream of life" (Stoddart 1983, p. 11). The development of capitalism at this time and the subsequent place of women suggested that "a related psychohistorical dynamic operated to diminish the personhood of woman" (Dixson 1976, p. 63). Women were

regarded as wives and mothers with no other role, despite the increasing numbers of women who were working in the public sphere.

FEMINIST MOVEMENTS - THE FIRST WAVE

Australian feminist historians (Summers 1975; Dixson 1976; Spearritt 1992; Lake 1993; Magarey 1993) have provided wide-ranging perspectives on the position of women in the late 19th and early 20th century. The depression in the 1890s was a result of the collapse of the land boom and a crisis in the main export industries of wool and grain, as well as a collapse of the financial system (Alexander 1989). During this time, despite there being many more men than women in the colony, the recorded figures for 1891 to 1901 showed that the number of women between the ages of 25 and 29 who did not marry dropped, and in one state, Victoria, over 51% of women in this age group remained single (Magarey 1993). Also in New South Wales the birth rate fell by a third and similar reductions were noted in other parts of Australia. There is circumstantial evidence that women had access to birth control methods that effectively gave them more control over contraception (Summers 1975), and Magarey (1993) speculated that a possible explanation for this situation was "that women themselves might have exercised some choice in relation to marriage" (p. 93). This protest and resistance against the state of marriage may give some clue as to the increased activism amongst women that led to women's emancipation in the next century. When the economy improved more jobs became available in white-collar work thus providing women with more opportunities for independent living and the decline of the birth rate enabled women to experience a sense of freedom from being continually pregnant (Magarey 1993).

The First Wave Feminists (feminist/ism was not used by these women but they have since been called this by feminists of the second wave), were very active in establishing various organisations to promote the suffrage movement. Among these was the first national organisation, the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Australasia (WCTU) which "gained impetus from the cause of white women (from all classes) brutalised by drunken husbands" (Spearritt 1992, p. 332). This increased feminist activity, promoted public discussion on the 'women question' and politicised the issues of the suffrage movement and beyond into social issues, especially workplace conditions, unionism, education, health and welfare. They were successful in getting their ideas published in the mainstream newspapers as well as in *Dawn: A Journal for Australian Women*, first published in 1888 by feminist activist Louisa Lawson. This early feminist

journal was produced until 1905 and had both feminist 'militant' articles as well as practical advice for farmers' wives thus keeping women informed about political matters as well as information relevant to their everyday lives (Ferrier 1992).

The more active of these early feminists, who were instrumental in achieving these progressive milestones, often came from privileged, middle class backgrounds. Many chose to remain unmarried, despite the large number of single men available, which enabled them to devote more time and energy to their political cause (Spearritt 1992) and to their own leisure. The most influential of these feminists earnestly spoke about the conditions and needs of their less privileged white sisters, and for the emancipation of middle-class women in general (Dixson 1986).

At the same time as the Australian feminists were demanding their rights, over twelve thousand miles away, in England, similar political activity was taking place. In a letter to Catherine Helen Spence, who was a South Australian feminist and Australia's first woman political candidate, John Stuart Mill (Spence 1975 [1910]), reported that the suffrage movement in England was making great progress predicting that it was likely to be successful there ahead of the colonies, but as it turned out

Women in the Australian colonies were emancipated politically well ahead of their English sisters, and the colonies proved progressive on a whole range of issues that constituted the goals of first-wave feminism: divorce and child custody legislation, secondary and tertiary education for women, the entry of women to the professions and married women's right to hold property.(Grimshaw & Willett 1981, p. 134).

The suffragettes in South Australia also worked to get women enfranchised as early as 1894, and the Commonwealth Government granted the vote to women in Federal elections in 1902. As Grimshaw and Willett (1981) further state,

Colonial society had clearly been modestly supportive of notions of sexual egalitarianism, despite such apparent handicaps as a convict heritage, a harsh and often lonely interior, and a population largely drawn from the British lower social strata (p. 134).

The 1890s and the early 20th century have been exposed not as a time of unity leading up to Confederation in 1901, but rather, because of the previous

exclusion of a woman's perspective, a time of political struggle and a "contest between men and women ... for the control of the national culture" (Lake 1993, p. 2).

The early feminists, about half of whom were spinsters or widows, came from privileged backgrounds and actively sought women's rights. The suffrage campaign gained momentum when more women from different sections of society, including women in the paid work-force who were concerned about their jobs and conditions, joined the movement. Following the granting of the vote to women in six states the feminists continued to campaign for the rights of women in all aspects of their lives. They challenged the legal position of married women regarding property rights, custody rights, violence and divorce issues as well as women's unpaid labour and the difference in acceptable sexual mores for women. These women were providing role models that challenged the dominant stereotype of the feminine woman and replaced it with one of a 'new woman' who was able to be independent and have more choices in her life (Summers 1975). Feminists found that they were involved in a continuous struggle to change "a masculinist culture based on the legal, economic and sexual subordination of women" (Spearritt 1992, p. 347). Although their goals were not achieved in their life time they did provide the foundations for fundamental changes in gender relations.

CHALLENGING THE VICTORIAN STEREOTYPES OF PASSIVE WOMEN: "LADY TRAVELLERS", EXPLORERS AND ADVENTURERS

The first wave feminists had managed to influence political policies regarding many issues that directly affected women's everyday lives, such as education, work opportunities and property rights. The success of this initial political fervour by women and the changes that followed appeared to enable some women to become more independent and not be so confined to the more dependent, restrictive roles that had previously been ascribed to them. In the late 19th and early 20th century women began to challenge traditional Victorian stereotype of femininity based on passiveness and frailty and the concern to be decorative and modest. The exploits of some of these women adventurers from various Western countries have only recently been discovered and documented by feminist researchers. Outdoor recreational activities, such as mountaineering, travelling, exploring and cycling, provided opportunities for women to achieve a sense of freedom from the restrictive Victorian lives they were living and have some leisure (Bialeschki 1992; Lynch 1989).

There were many adventurous women who travelled during the latter part of Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901); they were mostly middle-aged, travelled alone and as Middleton (1965) states: "this outburst of female energy is undoubtedly linked with the increasingly vigorous movement for women's political and social emancipation" (p. 3). It also meant that many women, particularly middle class women, were becoming aware of restrictions in their lives, both in dress and confined prescribed roles in the home, and were wanting to have more freedom and be more adventurous.

Birkett (1989) recounts the stories of the exploits and adventures in various places around the world that "had given these Victorian women their newfound freedom" (p. ix). Birkett retraced some of their journeys and taking with her, 'their Victorian eyes and images' attempted to understand the lifeworlds of the women. David-Neel one of the women travellers, wrote in her journal, "adventure, is my only reason for living" (quoted in Birkett 1989, p. ix). These are powerful words that convey the strong, independent and wilful women that Birkett discovered in her research.

Gaunt left Australia for Britain in 1900 aged 39 following the death of her husband. Like many of the other women that Birkett (1989) researched, Gaunt had a disruptive and unhappy family life and did not want to become like her mother confined to the role of wife in the domestic sphere of the home. The attraction of a world beyond the domestic sphere provided the motivation for these women and they became explorers like their male counterparts. After learning about men going into unexplored country Schaffer (1911, quoted in Bialeschki 1992) and a friend said: "Why not? We can starve as well as they ... the ground will be no harder to sleep upon, the waters no deeper to swim ... so we planned a trip". (p. 17)

Birkett (1989), with her late 20th century feminist background, found that as she researched these women travellers they "became increasingly unattractive role models" (p. xi). The women explained and legitimised the purpose of their travels as being 'unquestioned members of the white colonial world' which led them to internalise their role as white men. Birkett is critical of their class and race bias, but nevertheless these women were travellers and adventurers and explorers and came in for some strong criticism from the British press. Reflecting no doubt the attitudes and values of Victorian society of the time, and in particular 'normal' ideologies of a woman's place, the journalists ensured that these women were kept in their place, by writing such lines as:

Although it is true that Mrs Gaunt took journeys which no white woman has yet taken, and deserves a high tribute for her physical endurance and courage, it is also true that these journeys involved no extraordinary danger or difficulty. They were not those of a pioneer in an unknown and unsubdued country ... she was a 'tourist' (Birkett 1989, p. 193).

Other women climbed mountains for adventure. They were mostly 'ladies of means', in other words middle class women. Freda du Faur, an Australian, became the first woman to reach the summit of Mt. Cook in New Zealand in 1910. She received many criticisms related to her unmarried status, clothing and her climbing ability but continued to be successful achieving many other formidable climbs (Dunedin Collective for Women, 1976). The early mountaineers and other sporting women showed, by example, that women could be physically active and that exercising the body was not detrimental to their health as had been espoused by the medical profession during the 19th and early 20th century (Hargreaves 1994). They provided different and potentially exciting role models for women.

PHYSICALLY ACTIVE WOMEN

The emancipation of women and the development of feminism at the end of the 19th century was a phenomena that affected many western societies, including Australia. Although most of the political action was involved with addressing issues such as women's dependence on men (Lake 1993), changes in the division of labour (Lee 1993), conflicts in the gender order (Magarey *et al* 1993) there was also a growing awareness amongst women of the freedom and enjoyment associated with physical activity. Despite the concerns about the effect of this activity on their health, both working class and middle class women had increasing access to various sports but as Hargreaves (1994) points out "the idea that they were forms of leisure which had recuperative qualities and were thus functional to 'work was central to their legitimation" (p. 110).

Recreation for most women at this time consisted of activities which were considered appropriate to women's assumed instincts and abilities. Home-based activities related to women's roles of wife and mother such as sewing, knitting, reading, singing and drawing were the most common. Tennis, which was originally played in the spacious grounds of the wealthy, became a popular past-time among the middle class and was seen as being 'suitable' for women in their elaborate clothing of the late 1800s, because it could be played in a leisurely manner (Daly 1982; Bushby & Jobling 1985). Women who became more active

in sporting events challenged the stereotype of the passive, delicate female and presented a more "vigorous model of the sporting woman" (Hargreaves 1994, p. 211).

The women who wanted to be more active outside the home needed to assert their rights to become involved in more public venues. Dress reform became part of this movement towards increased freedom for women. During the 1890s women were urged by more strident feminists to reject the corset, Veblen's, (1899) symbol of idleness, and adopt more comfortable, loose fitting clothing. An alternative dress style of divided skirt and baggy knickers which was being worn by some daring young women, enabled more women to participate in active outdoor pursuits.

Cycling was an ideal means for promoting women's liberty and freedom and provided women with excitement and pleasure (Hargreaves 1994). Some cycling clubs became known for their political activity and were recognised as being part of the women's emancipation movement and because of this cycling was seen "as a symbol of women's socio-political emancipation" (Simpson 1995, p. 213–214). These clubs also provided safety in numbers for the women riders who risked being jeered at and molested as they rode down the streets. As Simpson (1995) stated, "for a significant number of women who joined them, clubs represented a statement of female independence and solidarity" (p. 213).

THE WAR YEARS

During the years prior to World War One through to the beginning of World War Two, Australian women continued their political action, attempting to influence and challenge the prevailing social and political structures and frameworks and become active agents of social change. In particular, women's health and issues of sexuality became more urgent during the post-War One period when there was an extremely high incidence of venereal disease in Australia (Damousi 1992). Various feminists, including Street, probably one of the most influential feminist of this period (Lake 1990), became known for their work in advocating for women's rights to birth control. Their efforts attempted to give women more control over their bodies and their lives, thus providing an alternative to motherhood.

The Second World War brought further change to women's roles in society including the opportunity to be part of the paid work force. During the first two years of the war, over half a million new jobs were created in the defence force

for the production of 'the machinery of war' and nearly half of these jobs were taken up by women (McMurchy *et al.* 1983). Women also entered the armed forces, joined the Australian Women's Land Army (Scott 1986) and in 1942 when the whole economy was placed on a war footing and a national emergency resulted, all women including married women with children were encouraged to enter the paid workforce. This was a challenge to the basis of family life where women with children were expected to remain in the private sphere of the home. Various initiatives were adopted to address childcare. These included: structuring part-time shifts around the school day; the provision of a small number of council funded child-care centres; and the establishment of a Kindergarten Union which mostly provided child supervision for middle-class women who no longer had domestic servants (Darian-Smith 1990, p. 125).

In the early years of the war, upper and middle-class women established voluntary networks to aid the war effort. These women had the time to devote to unpaid labour and the money to purchase uniforms and badges. Working-class women's contributions 'were structured around the workplace as women knitted during lunch breaks or held competitions to raise donations' (Darian-Smith 1990, p. 56, cited in Saunders & Bolton 1992, p. 379).

They were mostly married women who were relieved of the obligation to find jobs in the work place because of the stigma attached to middle class women working in the paid work force. When an order was given by the government for all single women to take jobs in essential industry, many daughters of influential men who had good contacts also managed to get exemption. These young women spent the war years in a whirl of parties and dances with officers, occasionally doing some voluntary work, and when the Americans landed in Australia for rest and recreation the social and sexual encounters increased (Summers 1975). Young women who wanted to have sexual adventures with American servicemen were treated by feminists with little sympathy, "feminists could not appreciate young women's desire for pleasure" (Lake 1990, p. 21). This rather puritanical stand by the feminists about young women's pleasures was related to their concerns about venereal disease and prostitution but also showed a lack of understanding about the "sexual and moral turbulence engendered during the years of the Pacific war" (Saunders & Bolton 1992, p. 392).

However, the war had enabled many women in Australia to be independent and self-sufficient. Their labour was in demand and without it the economy and services would have been unable to function. The return of the men from

overseas after the war meant that the women, who had been indispensable in the work-force, were made redundant and encouraged to revert to their roles as wives, mothers and carers (Summers 1975; McMurchy *et al* 1983).

THE POST-WAR YEARS

The gender segregation of women in the home and men as the breadwinners in the public sphere of the work place was the dominant situation during the post-war period (Gilding 1991) The modern housewife emerged during the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s (Evans & Saunders 1992). Motherhood was seen as the pinnacle of women's fulfilment (Dixon 1975). Those women, who did not enjoy being just a mother, agitated to get into the work-force but they were made to feel guilty because of the publicity given to Bowlby's (1975) research on maternal deprivation. For many mothers it meant making the decision to stay at home for the sake of the children and those who went out to work were labelled 'bad' mothers. At the same time, women had the potential for more freedom and choice than ever before; an expanding labour market and the availability of The Pill in the early sixties meant more opportunities for change.

The dominant pattern for most women was however to attend school until aged fifteen or sixteen and then leave and either work in shops, offices or nursing jobs or stay at home and help their mother until they got married, had children and stayed at home as house-wives and mothers (Anderson 1975). A small percentage of girls went on to higher education, mostly to Teachers' Training Colleges and a few to Universities. In 1968, 3.9% of the female population over 15 years were enrolled in courses of study other than full-time secondary school (Humphreys 1975). Most of the graduates from these institutions followed the pattern of getting married and having children soon after graduation.

During this time, women who had doubts about the restrictions of their housewife and mother role in the nuclear family did not gain any sympathy from other women or society in general. In a survey conducted in Melbourne in 1974 on women's attitudes towards their role, 95% of the Australian born women said that housework was the main concern of women; 95% said that most mothers think of their children before themselves and 75% believe that women have to give up more freedom than men and many felt that it was not right for a woman to have interests outside the family (Penman 1974). Suburban neurosis (Macdonald 1972) emerged as the name for a condition that manifested in women, of self-

doubt, general dissatisfaction with their lot and a feeling that "there must be something wrong with me" (Summers 1975, p. 426; Friedan 1963).

The ideological construct of separate spheres where women were confined to the home, the private sphere, in the roles of wives and mothers and men dominated the workplace, the public sphere (Anderson 1992; Spearritt 1992) has had a long lasting effect on the position of women in capitalist societies throughout the world. This sexual division of labour has been maintained, albeit in a modified form, into the late 20th century with women still being responsible for the majority of work in the home and the majority who are in the paid work force being restricted to a narrow band of occupations in the public sphere (Bittman 1991; Beasley 1994).

For many of the women in this study this was the social environment in which they grew up, married and had children. They received many conflicting messages about child-rearing and their role as mothers; at the same time they were not encouraged to make choices.

Those women who were born in this post-war period, and are now in their forties and early fifties grew up in what is known as 'the modern' world. By the time they were in their adolescence Betty Friedan (1965) had provided women with a different view of women's lives and opportunities and challenged all women to 'grow up' and accept responsibility for themselves and their lives. They were in their twenties when the Second Wave Feminists were beginning to advocate changes at both the personal and political level. The demands that were made to ensure a more equitable and inclusive environment in which these young women grew up, could not be ignored by the various levels of government in Australia.

As the women's movement gained momentum in the 1970s and the feminist agenda placed strategic importance on women's employment and equality (Probert, 1994), the women who had found themselves caught in the housewife and mother roles began to assert their rights in all areas of their lives, including leisure. The realisation that they were not alone in their experiences became a powerful motivating force for these women in their struggle for emancipation.

FEMINIST MOVEMENTS - THE SECOND WAVE

The second wave women's movement began in the 1960s in Great Britain and the United States, and officially in Australia when the Women's Liberation

Movement was formed in 1969 (Summers 1975). In Australia, information about the new women's liberation movement came mainly from the United States and women's liberation groups emerged in capital cities, formed mostly by young women who had also been active in the anti-Vietnam war movement (Curthoys 1992; Reade 1994). Initially, consciousness-raising was a central activity of these groups, enabling women to understand the nature of their oppression and also to realise that the personal is political. Many also read avidly, especially any feminist material from America (Mercer 1975; Simms 1981). The focus of the movement during the early years, both politically and academically was on young white, middle-class heterosexual women.

The new movement was more strident than previous ones in its demands for equality and justice for women, and at a National Women's Liberation Conference held in Sydney, May 1970, the demands of the women's movement were reinforced, including:

child-care, rights to abortion, access to safe and effective contraception, equal pay, equal job opportunity, [and] an end to sexist advertising and images of women in the media (Curthoys 1992, p. 434).

While many feminist issues were on the agenda, concerns about women's access to recreation activities and leisure and general wellbeing did not emerge until the mid 1970s when Anderson's (1975) report on Australian women and the place of leisure in their lives was published.

The spread of feminist ideas at this time was recognised by the United Nations declaration of an International Women's Year (1975) which had a world-wide impact on the status of women. During this year the Australian Federal and most State governments provided funding for many conferences including a National Women's Health Conference, 'Women's Health in a Changing Society'. This conference attended by 950 delegates from across the country, highlighted the many issues regarding women's health that have subsequently led to the acceptance of a social health perspective, rather than the bio-medical model with preventative policies being accepted by most state health departments. Themes for papers included violence against women, women's work, problems of isolation, aboriginal women's health and suburban neurosis. There were no papers on the health of midlife and older women nor was there any recognition of leisure and recreation as being a vital part of women's health.

By the early 1980s many initiatives for women were being implemented at both state and federal government level. These included: the appointment of women's advisors in sport and recreation; the establishment of consultative committees on women's sport and recreation and the organisation of conferences with overseas speakers (with the main focus being sport). Politically active feminists, recognised the importance of working both within and outside government as a means of achieving their aims. "[S]o much have feminists entered the state bureaucracy to achieve feminist ends that a specifically Australian term - 'femocrats' - has been coined to describe them" (Curthoys 1992, p. 426)

Feminists including Darlison (Coles) (1981, 1985a, 1985b) and Betschild (1983, 1986) were also actively involved in the national promotion of women's leisure and sport issues. Their political work, which was framed within a liberal feminist perspective, was focused on equity issues and the barriers and constraints to women's sport and leisure.

The women's movement in general and the second wave feminists in particular, were now regarded as a political force in most areas of government and society. Speakers at national conferences on health, women and labour, technological change, feminism and socialism provided important new insights into women's position in Australia and also produced volumes of research papers that remain valuable reference material for students in the 1990s (Magarey *et al* 1994). The enthusiasm with which women attended these conferences and the intellectual stimulation they received provided them with the impetus to demand a more intellectual approach to feminism and feminist theory and highlighted the need for women's studies courses within the tertiary sector.

FEMINISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

The development of Women's Studies in tertiary institutions arose out of the political activity, including various national conferences, of the early 1970s. The abolition of fees for tertiary education attracted increasing numbers of women and particularly mature age women who were interested in the feminist movement and the place of women in the world. This provided the impetus for feminist academics to propose units in Women's Studies and, after much internal institutional struggle, these were offered in three Australian universities in 1973 and 1974. Subsequently, various models of Women's

Studies were developed with the Australian National University achieving a breakthrough with an independently located programme in Women's Studies established by Ann Curthoys. Other universities followed suit, with the University of Adelaide in 1992 becoming the first Australian university to have a fully-fledged Department of Women's Studies. The graduates from these courses helped swell the growing debate on feminism in almost all the traditional disciplines. As the next group of young women completed their doctorates and became academics most disciplines and departments began to recognise that a feminist perspective had at least to be represented in their curricula. Amongst these new theoretical frameworks were feminist critiques of Leisure Studies and the effect of oppression on women's roles, their lives and their leisure (Green *et al* 1987; Wimbush & Talbot 1988).

Women's Studies included foundation courses in Feminist Theory. This provided the opportunity for academics and students to study the historical development of feminism, which can be traced back to the fifteenth century and possibly as far as Sappho (Eisenstein 1984, p. xiii), and also to place the political and applied experiences and information from the previous decades of women's political action into a theoretical context. "Inevitably too they helped develop a critique of 'establishment' academic disciplines, all of which had been constructed and controlled by men" (Coote & Campbell 1987, p. 44). As Curthoys (1992) notes,

the discipline [history], in being so concerned with the 'public' and so little with the so-called 'private' sphere of life, had dealt almost entirely with the activities of men (p. 440).

One of these feminist criticisms was the inherent sexism in social science research. Feminists set about to challenge the fundamental assumptions, including sexism, racism and ageism, of the various disciplines and argued the necessity for future research to be by, on and for women (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

The expansion of feminist scholarship in the areas of social and political theory led to many challenges to the most fundamental presuppositions and categories of mainstream theory (Pateman 1986). Feminists in the 1960s and early 1970s (for example, Friedan 1963; Greer 1970; Millett 1970; Mitchell 1971) began to develop grand theory-type explanations regarding women's oppression and their caring roles in the family. They suggested that women's oppression is structural and caused by different systems such as capitalism and patriarchy which are constricting for all the population (Stanley & Wise 1983). Although these early theories provided the basis for the traditional feminist positions, liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist,

subsequent academic work has expanded these so that, in the 1990s, feminism encompasses a myriad of interpretations and perspectives (Henderson *et al.* 1996). The approaches are not exclusive but provide various perspectives from which to theorise about the ways in which women have been oppressed. There appears to be no unified theory to explain women's position given,

the very real differences both between women of different racial, class, age and ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations and also the differences within ourselves as we negotiate the contradictions of our positions: working class but also lesbian, lesbian but also black, black but not aboriginal, aboriginal but also light skinned, middle class but also disabled, white middle class and able-bodied but also menopausal ... [and so on] (Schaffer 1994, p. 29).

Summary

In a little over one hundred years, the 1880s to 1980s, Australia experienced two wide-reaching political movements (first and second wave feminism) that enabled many women to have access to greater opportunities for their personal and professional development. The first wave feminists had succeeded in achieving many of their goals regarding divorce and child custody legislation, increased education opportunities for women, the right of entry into the professions and married women's right to hold property. Enfranchisement for women in South Australia in 1894, was soon followed by the Commonwealth Government granting the vote to women in federal elections in 1902.

During second wave feminism women succeeded in getting many of their concerns on the national political agenda. In particular, universities and colleges were developing women's affirmative action policies as well as incorporating women's studies courses which began to formulate feminist theories and women's perspectives in other subjects. Policies were also developed about gender inclusive language, both verbal and written, in all areas of academic endeavour.

The adventurous women of the late 19th and early 20th century who resisted women's passive roles provided inspiration and alternative role models for other generations in many western countries. Australia had its share of women, although still not well documented, who have continued to find personal satisfaction a variety of physical activities.

The women's health movement in Australia, which could possibly be seen as having its beginnings with Jessie Street's work on sexuality issues and venereal disease after World War One, became of age with the 1975 National Women's

Health Conference. The increased awareness of the issues regarding women's health resulted in the establishment of women's advisors in many state health departments and a National Women's Health Policy was developed and approved in 1988.

The combined effect of the development of women's health policies and the appointment of women's officers in the state departments of recreation and sport, as well as a Federal Women, Sport and Recreation policies enabled the issues of women's health, sport, recreation and leisure to be taken more seriously. Universities and colleges, as well as having the more traditional physical education courses that had been in place for many years began offering courses in leisure studies. Although these were dominated by male academics and the more traditional approach to leisure, there were a few women, some of whom were feminists, appointed to these departments who began to challenge these perspectives on leisure and to provide a more gender-inclusive approach.

Changes in attitudes and perceptions, new laws, (for example the Sex Discrimination Act (1983) and the Affirmative Action Act (1986)) and the appointment of Equal Opportunity Commissioners in all states and territories, have not been achieved without enormous energy, commitment and political knowledge from feminists throughout the various tiers of government and other institutions. Also, on the personal level, many women have been effective in changing society's view of their position as wives, mothers and householders in their everyday lives by being assertive and knowing more about their rights as women. Despite the increased political and personal awareness of women's situation in general, the lives and experiences of midlife and older women have only recently emerged as a focus in feminist research and literature.

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APPENDIX B

THE STAGED ANALYSIS OF A SECTION OF WINNIE'S INTERVIEW

This appendix outlines the process of analysing a section of the original transcript on enjoyment

Stage 1: The interview is recorded on Winnie's experience of enjoyment

Winnie and I had both been members of a women's bushwalking group in South Australia and knew each other quite well. She chose to come to my house to do the interview. The interview proceeded in a friendly manner and we both appeared to feel comfortable with the process and the level of informality which allowed for Winnie to share her experiences with me.

Stage 2: A provisional analysis of the taped interview is documented on the same day as the interview

A comment in my diary after Winnie's interview reads:

it is such a delight to hear my dear friend talking and sharing her thoughts with me. Realise that when she was talking about her flow experience her words just flowed too, it was easy and it **sounded like flow**.

Enjoyment for Winnie seems to involve the following:

doing things outdoors; being physically active; being with women friends; some spiritual component; reading on a rainy day; reliving some of her childhood experiences of farm life by being responsible for her own piece of land.

Stage 3: Verbatim transcript of a section of the interview

M. [After a rather long background 'briefing'] OK that brings us up to the present...

W. That wasn't very brief, was it Myra?

M. That's OK some people once they're asked something like that, and they've never talked much about their life, they just go. To have someone who listens it's an interesting process...

W. Yes reminiscing..

M. Well what I'd like you to do now is to think back to a time when you were really enjoying yourself and having a lot of fun and pleasure...

W. One particular time...

M. It could be that or it could be a period of time when everything just seemed to be great, and describe it to me. It could be an afternoon when you were bush-walking or something, or it could be a time when you were at Ernabella or something like that ... what you would understand as enjoyment and fun.

W. Well the first thing that popped into my mind was Easter time canoeing at Chowilla with a bunch of women, six women. It's a tributary system of the Murray, right on the border where the Murray comes through from

Victoria and there's NSW just up there. It combined physical exertion, that sense of effort, and it was an effort, I wasn't very fit. I went to a gym for a bit to get 'suddenly fit' and I overdid it a bit and my triceps were really painful and of course in canoeing you're using your triceps a lot, so I was weary. But that was fine, it was within my limits and it's good to be pushed and it's only something like that that does that. I don't push myself very much. And the company of women and fun ... I mean women are so good at having fun, and each time I go off with a group of women it reminds me of childhood, of play ... being really playful, and everything is turned into humour. Deb's really good at that. And being in an equal group of people, no gender divisions or couple divisions.

And it was a journey, I think I like travel ... there was a beginning and an end. We were travelling over three days with a definite camp-site each day and covering ground or water and discovering things. Yes, and outdoors, which goes without saying. I suppose there's only one activity I enjoy better inside than outside and that's reading. Mostly everything I enjoy happens outside.

M. OK so other things you enjoy, reading?

W. Oh yes I've always enjoyed that, torch under the bed as a kid. Oh yes, that's a great lifelong passion. If I had to choose one thing it would be the image of being under an eiderdown on a cold and drizzly day with a feast of books. Or just one good book, that's my idea of heaven. It has to be sort of a rather drizzly dull day because if it's sunny, it's not so much the sunshine that draws me out it's that I've got lots of things to do that need doing, but I mightn't particularly want to do them but I've tied up my life so much that they have to be done. So I've got no guilty conscience lying under an eiderdown on a wet day reading.

M. Any other things....

W. I love listening to music and I love dancing, although I don't go out of my way to do that. I've actually enjoyed the discipline of study. I'm not doing it at the moment, but to be actually stretched and pushed into thinking about things I wouldn't normally come across. There's a pleasure in that, that is a particular pleasure, an intellectual pleasure...

M. And making connections and ...

W. Yes ideas, they're really seductive ... I like being around animals, I've got a horse at the moment. That feels good, and I like working with my hands I spin a little bit, not much and wood, gardening, things that I have to do on my land ...

M. But you enjoy it?

W. I do if it's not stressing me too much, like if ... that's why I've chosen to live on land that has to be looked after, but I'm not making my living out of so if things start going a bit, sliding down hill my life doesn't depend on it ... my livelihood,

[After many more responses on leisure, health and flow and her dream for the future] I said: OK well that's it, thank you very much.

[And Winnie said] Oh, I didn't mention the baths once, the moonlight baths. It's a ritual and it's pleasurable but it's a discipline as well, it's like going to yoga every week, I really put that as a high priority like yoga. Yoga is sacrosanct, I never let anything interfere with Monday night, and once a month I have the bath as a ritual, it's like celebrating the new moon. It is

pleasure but I don't do it as an indulgence, 'cos sometimes I think oooh do I really have to do it, must I, but I suppose it's like people going to church on Sundays, it forces me to take time-out, reflect and because it's honouring something in nature, it's cyclical, it's like the female it's the feminine principle I'm honouring, it's non-Christian, it's pagan in that sense, so it's honouring an ancient spirituality. It's my one outward manifestation of an inward spirituality that I don't show or talk about, I can make light of the Full Moon bath but that's basically what it's tapping into and what it's expressing, and it is important, and I've been doing that for years now. There have been a few missed for safety purposes with the fire risk. Some other women keep it going, understand it and maintain it.

Stage 4: Initial identification of 'natural' meaning units

M. Well what I'd like you to do now is to think back to a time when you

181. One particular time? ...

[It could be that or it could be a period of time when everything just seemed to be great, and describe it to me.]

182. Well the first thing that popped into my mind was Easter time canoeing at Chowilla

183. with a bunch of women, six women.

184. It's a tributary system of the Murray, right on the border where the Murray comes through from Victoria and there's NSW just up there.

185. It combined physical exertion,

186. that sense of effort,

187. and it was an effort, I wasn't very fit.

188. I went to a gym for a bit to get 'suddenly fit'

189. and I overdid it a bit, and my triceps were really painful - and of course in canoeing you're using your triceps a lot,

190. so I was weary. But that was fine, it was within my limits

191. and it's good to be pushed, and it's only something like that that does that. I don't push myself very much.

192. And the company of women and fun ... I mean women are so good at having fun,

193. and each time I go off with a group of women it reminds me of childhood of play ... being really playful,

194. and everything is turned into humour. Deb's really good at that.

195. And being in an equal group of people. No gender divisions, or couple divisions.

196. And it was a journey. I think I like travel ... there was a beginning and an end.

197. We were travelling over three days with a definite camp-site each day, and covering ground or water, and discovering things.

198. Yes, and outdoors, which goes without saying.

299. I suppose there's only one activity. I enjoy better inside than outside and that's reading.

200. Mostly everything I enjoy happens outside.

201. [reading] Oh yes I've always enjoyed that, torch under the bed as a kid. Oh yes that's a great lifelong passion.

202. If I had to choose one thing, it would be the image of being under an eiderdown, on a cold and drizzly day, with a feast of books. Or just one good book, that's my idea of heaven.

203. It has to be sort of a rather drizzly dull day, because if it's sunny, it's not so much the sunshine that draws me out, it's that I've got lots of things to do that need doing.

204. but I mightn't particularly want to do them, but I've tied up my life so much, that they have to be done.

205. So I've got no guilty conscience lying under an eiderdown on a wet day, reading.

206. I love listening to music

207. and I love dancing, although I don't go out of my way to do that.

208. I've actually enjoyed the discipline of study. I'm not doing it at the moment, but to be actually stretched and pushed into thinking about things I wouldn't normally come across.

209. There's a pleasure in that, that is a particular pleasure, an intellectual pleasure...

210. I like being around animals. I've got a horse at the moment, that feels good.

211. and I like working with my hands. I spin a little bit, not much

212. and wood, gardening, things that I have to do on my land ...

213. [you enjoy it?] I do if it's not stressing me too much,

214. like if ... that's why I've chosen to live on land that has to be looked after,

215. but I'm not making my living out of it, so if things start going a bit, sliding down hill, my life doesn't depend on it ...

741. Oh, I didn't mention the baths once, the moonlight baths.

742. It's a ritual, and it's pleasurable

743. but it's a discipline as well, it's like going to yoga every week. I really put that as a high priority, like yoga, yoga is sacrosanct, I never let anything interfere with Monday night,

744. and once a month I have the bath as a ritual, it's like celebrating the new moon,

745. it is pleasure, but I don't do it as an indulgence,

746. 'cos sometimes I think oooh do I really have to do it, must I?

747. But I suppose it's like people going to church on Sundays, it forces me to take time-out, reflect

748. and because it's honouring something in nature, it's cyclical, it's like the female, it's the feminine principle I'm honouring.

749. It's non-Christian, it's pagan in that sense, so it's honouring an ancient spirituality.

750. It's my one outward manifestation of an inward spirituality that I don't show or talk about.

751. I can make light of the Full Moon bath but that's basically what it's tapping into and what it's expressing,

752. and it is important, and I've been doing that for years now.

753. There have been a few missed for safety purposes with the fire risk.

754. Some other women keep it going, understand it and maintain it.

Stage 5: Discovery and labelling of the central meaning of each unit

Winnie described an enjoyable experience she had, canoeing on a tributary of the Murray River.

She was with a bunch of six women.

She knew it would involve physical exertion, and effort.

She also knew she wasn't very fit and decided to go to a gym to get 'suddenly fit'

At the gym she overdid it, and found her triceps were really painful - when she was canoeing.

Although she felt weary it was fine, and within her limits.

She recognised that it's good to be pushed, and doing a physical activity like canoeing does that. In her everyday life she doesn't push herself very much.

Winnie enjoys the company of women and feels that women are so good at having fun.

When she goes off with a group of women it reminds her of childhood of play ... being really playful, where everything is turned into humour. And being in an equal group of people where there are no gender divisions, or couple divisions.

It was a journey. I think I like travel ... there was a beginning and an end.

They were travelling outdoors over three days with a definite camp-site each day, and discovering things. Mostly everything she enjoys happens outside.

The only other activity she enjoys better inside than outside is reading.

That's a great lifelong passion; torch under the bed as a kid.

Her idea of heaven is the image of being under an eiderdown, on a cold and drizzly day, with a feast of books, or just one good book.

It has to be sort of a rather drizzly dull day, because if it's sunny, it's not so much the sunshine that draws her out, but it's that she's got lots of things to do that need doing. And although she mightn't particularly want to do them, she has tied up her life so much, that they have to be done.

So she's got no guilty conscience lying under an eiderdown on a wet day, reading.

Listening to music and dancing are enjoyable although she doesn't go out of her way to dance.

The discipline of study has given her pleasure, a particular pleasure, an intellectual pleasure ... Ideas, they're really seductive ... to be actually stretched and pushed into thinking about things she wouldn't normally come across.

Having animals and working with her hands. And things that she has to do on her land ... gardening, wood-work, provided it's not stressing her too much.

She has chosen to live on land that has to be looked after, but because she's not making her living out of it, there's not so much pressure on her if things start going a bit, sliding down hill, her life doesn't depend on it...

Winnie was surprised that she didn't mention the moonlight baths once, considering how important they are in her life.

They are a ritual, and pleasurable.

It is also a discipline like going to yoga every week, which she puts as a high priority, yoga is sacrosanct. nothing interferes with yoga night.

Once a month the bath is a ritual, celebrating the new moon.
She regards it as a pleasure, not as an indulgence.
Sometimes she wonders whether she really has to do it.
But it forces her to take time-out and reflect.
It honours something in nature, it's cyclical, like the female, it's the feminine principle she is honouring,
It is non-Christian, pagan in that sense, so it's honouring an ancient spirituality.
It reflects an inward spirituality that is not seen or talked about.
Despite making light of the Full Moon bath she is basically tapping into and expressing this spirituality.
It has been going on for years now and has become an important part of her life. Occasionally there have been a few missed for safety purposes because of the fire risk.
Some of her women friends, who understand the significance of the ritual, keep it going when Winnie is away.

Stage 6: Grouping of meaning units into themes

Enjoyment involves:

1. An outdoor life – mostly everything Winnie enjoys happens outside:

On a canoe trip.

- Being playful and having fun in the company of women.
- Everyone on an equal footing, no couple or gender divisions, which helped make it enjoyable.
- Physical effort involved.
- Importance of being pushed to her limits which does not happen very often, part of childhood learning.
- It was travelling on a journey of discovery with a beginning and an end.

'Doing things' on her land.

- It is her choice to live on the land that has to be looked after but she is not solely reliant on it for her living (a lasting effect from her childhood, being expected to do the farm jobs and feeling proud of her responsibilities).
- It's enjoyable if it's not stressing her too much.
- Gardening and being around animals.

Moonlight baths – a monthly ritual celebrating the moon.

- It's pleasurable
- Winnie also sees it as a discipline, like her weekly yoga class.
- An opportunity to take time out and reflect.
- More to it than just the bath under the full moon – honouring an ancient spirituality, a feminine principle
- Winnie's only outward sign of her inward spirituality, that is important to her and has been going on for years.
- Other women friends are involved who understand the significance of it and keep it going.

2. Being indoors:

- There's only one activity that Winnie enjoys better inside than outside and that's reading, a lifelong passion especially on a cold drizzly day.
- She does not have a guilty conscience if it is wet, otherwise if it is sunny she feels she 'should' be outside 'doing things'.

3. Other enjoyable activities:

- She has always loved listening to music.

(Winnie learnt to play the piano as a child, briefly, but got discouraged because of lack of encouragement from parents and not having a piano at home.

- She loves dancing.
- She enjoys the intellectual pleasure and discipline of study, the seduction of ideas.

Stages 7 and 8: Comparison of general themes across all the interviews and presentation of results in relation to the specific research focus.

These are presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH LETTER AND PARTICIPANTS' ETHICAL CONSENT FORM

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH: MIDLIFE WOMEN'S LEISURE

Ms Myra Betschild, a lecturer in Women's Studies at the University of Adelaide, is enrolled in a research degree from Sheffield City Polytechnic in the United Kingdom. For her thesis, she is interested in finding out what middle-aged women do to enjoy themselves. The data for her study is being collected in Adelaide and you are being invited to participate in the study.

The initial interview will last about an hour and will be tape recorded. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. The tape will be transcribed and you can be sent a copy of it for your final approval of its contents. The tapes will belong to the researcher and once the study is complete will be destroyed. Your name will be kept confidential and will not be connected with any of the study results.

If you agree to the above and would like to participate please sign below.

Signed:

Date:.....

Please also indicate whether you wish to check the transcript before it is used in the research project.

NO _____ I do not wish to check the transcript.

YES _____ I do want to check the transcript before it is used and I therefore provide an address at which I can be contacted.

YES _____ I'd like a copy of the transcript.

.....street

.....suburbpostcode.

.....Phone Number/s

Thank you Myra Betschild.

APPENDIX D

COPY OF ADVERTISEMENT PLACED IN *LIBERATION*, SEPTEMBER, 1992

INFORMATION ABOUT MY PROJECT FOR WOMEN WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN BEING INTERVIEWED.

I have been interested in women's health and leisure for over 20 years and particularly what we can do that makes us feel good, in control and empowered. What makes a healthy lifestyle? In particular I am trying to find out how women enjoy themselves. This could be anything from walking in the bush, going to a show, making love, cooking a meal, playing with grandchildren, or having coffee with friends or sitting watching the sunset, or day-dreaming or reading a good book, or gardening or ... in fact, anything else that we want to do.

My hunch is that women do a whole range of things for enjoyment and they do them at all sorts of times and in all sorts of situations not necessarily in specific 'non-work' times.

Much of the information about midlife for women seems to be fairly negative. We are nearing menopause, dreaded word, or coping with the empty nest syndrome, or having a mid-life crisis, and dealing with bodies that are wearing out and relationships that have worn thin etc etc. Little is heard about the joys of being 50 or so, the opening up of opportunities, more freedom to choose what we want to do (but need some plans and ways of doing this), the 'having the time of our lives' attitude.

I would like to interview women who are in midlife, for the purposes of this study aged between 40 and 65, and hear your stories about how you have fun.

If you are interested in being involved please phone or write to me at: 92 Battams Rd. Marden 5070. Phone: (08) 362 2627.
I look forward to hearing from you.

Myra Betschild.