.... The voices of everyday women
A self is probably the most impressive work of art we ever produce, surely the most intricate

J. Bruner, 2002
Background

• Theories
  – Traditional
    • Erikson
    • Levinson
  – Contemporary
    • Gilligan
    • Belenky, et al.
The method

Qualitative – interpretive phenomenology based on van Manen’s (1990) “lived experience”

- Demographic conversation
- Reflective questionnaire
- Contemplative imaging
## The women

<table>
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<th>Anglo</th>
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<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other**</th>
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<td>2 (LA/A; M)</td>
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*Black = African, African American, and Caribbean

**Other:
A = Asian
A/NA = Anglo/Native American
LA/A = Latina/Asian
M= Mixed Race
The 20s

• “Being a woman means to me being caring and humble; means being a giver, but standing strong.”

• “I care about my future, obtaining my goals and striving to be the best I can, I think of my family and my career a lot.”
“This picture is a great representation of who I am. A florist during the day and an artist at heart. A firm believer that you are the one who can make all your dreams come true. A modern day ‘Hippie’ who dreams of peace. I love to paint and deem it necessary to journal to stay sane.”
“I am a God fearing Christian woman who loves butterflies. I feel like the world has its two beautiful eyes on me every were I go, so I live life to the fullest everywhere I go and I live the world and everybody in it.”
The 30s

• “Wonderful, multi-tasking, mother. I love being a woman.” ...

• “I care about my job, my relationships and my future.”

• “Being a woman for me means being empowered. Taking care of myself. My parents were raised old school traditional Hispanic from Mexico. But my mother was never like the typical Hispanic woman. She was the mother and took care of the children, but she was never the typical servant to the husband kind of thing..... she empowered me and my sister both to take care of ourselves and to do whatever we wanted no matter if it was a male or a female job.”
“I try to work through events, BUT at the same time when you try to step on me I try to stand up for myself. And I think that surprises a lot of people. When you know what I have had enough this has to stop and it has to stop right now. And I think like – I try to accommodate you and that does not mean you have to treat me like you are treating me. When I get to that point, I find my voice and tell them. The rose is nice it is beautiful but it has thorns, you have to handle it with care or else its going to prick you.”
• “When you think of an eagle, they’re bold. They’re a... really there just bold. I think I’m very direct. I definitely would say I’m a people person. I love to live life, but if I believe in something I will stand up for myself. I’m not going to let someone... you are your own advocate. No one else is really going to stand up for you; unless you don’t stand up for you, which is where the boldness comes in.”
The 40s

• “Being a woman is a source of strength.”

• “My work is more demanding and more challenging than at any other time in my life. Yet it has never been less significant to me in the grand scheme of things. The family, that for most of my life has been the center of my efforts, no longer demands so much. But that family has blossomed into the source of great contentment.”
A garden well tended. A little wild and overgrown in spots, but on the whole, very pleasant.
The 50s

• “I am grateful that God created me a woman. I’ve always enjoyed “being a girl” physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually”

• “I care about my relationships with others, most importantly my [family].”
I visualize a Mountain meadow with tall trees reaching to the sky. It is noon, because I am half way through my life and, the sun is still shining brightly.
The sun rising in the morning. Because there is a whole lot more to go! There is a lot more to get.
The 60s

• “Being a woman is wonderful! I can’t imagine being anything else. I like my life, most of the time! I feel overwhelmed sometimes, with so many opportunities. I want to do it all.”

• “When you work hard and face all your problems with thought...”

• “I love my life now and everything I am doing....”

• “My relationships and family are most important.”
“I picture my self as a sunset over the water, with the sun just beginning to set. I feel I am in the second half of my life. I view my life as a beautiful sunset and hope as I age, I will slowly sink into the ocean, leaving behind a beautiful glow.”
“You know when you see a tree down and you can look down at the stump. It has all the rings. Umm, I was always a pretty vain person, and so when my face started to go I was real concerned. I do buy Oil of Olay in the gallon buckets and stuff! But now I really feel differently about it. I am letting my hair grow in grey. In previous years I paid lots of money to make my hair darker and then but light streaks in it. You know that’s the way it is naturally; it’s just sort of a different color! [Laughs]. So I am finding I am becoming a lot more comfortable with myself. A tree is a beautiful thing, but if you imagine it with all of those lines representing years of experience and all of that stuff. “
• “Being a woman has been an adventure. You have to be both strong and independent”

• “My family. I enjoy each day.”

• “Happy marriage (68 years); Enjoying things with family, traveling with family; getting children all through school and now grandkids and great grandkids through school”
Outdoors— the trees – The tree on the right has new growth and its branches curl to the light and reach for water the left tree branches are down to the earth but also up to the light. You can see the individual branches and growth. The individual branches are easy to see. I love the outdoors and new growth trees. They remind me of all the times I like to spend outdoors.
What does this tell us as healthcare providers?

Women today look at themselves as being strong and independent, yet being caring.

• Women born before the 1970s viewed this as a struggle:
  • “There were many things I wanted to do, but I also knew what was expected of me and that was to be a wife and a mother.”

• Women growing up later did not feel this constraint:
  • “I have choices, I can be the woman I want to be. I can have a career and I can be a wife and a mother.”

When asked about what stands out in their life family, relationships and spirituality are foremost.
What does this tell us as healthcare providers?

What would you like to share with a younger woman?

Across all generations the resounding voice was:
• Make careful decisions ...
• Follow your passions...
• Protect yourself...

“Do the things you want to do within reason; don’t wait around looking for the exact right moment because if you do you will probably miss it while you are waiting... Never, ever give up your dreams, what is important to you are your values and integrity. Get an education in an area in which you have a passion.”
Questions?

.... The beginning