Title:
The Woman’s Self: A Multigenerational and Transcultural View of Lifespan Development of Women

Carol M. Wiggs, PhD, RN, CNM, AHN-BC
School of Nursing, The University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, TX

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Abstract Text:
Lifespan development in women is a discursive and creative act; a process that engenders interpersonal relationships and reflective narrative stories of changes in the self. Traditional theories of lifespan development draw predominantly from a male perspective, discounting the richness of a woman’s life experiences as well as a multicultural perspective. Drawing on the peer reviewed literature regarding psychological development in women; a qualitative study was conducted using reflective questions and Photo-elicitation Interview techniques to explore what it was like to be a woman at various stages of life transition. A purposive sample of women was chosen for the study. Women were chosen from each decade of life (ages 8 to 88 years) and from multiple ethnic backgrounds (African American, Asian, Latina and Caucasian). The women’s responses were analyzed using van Manen’s theory of lived experiences both within and across decades for similarities and differences. The theme of relationship transcended all the decades, although the form of relationship varied, relationships within the family predominated. Photography was used to explore how each woman currently viewed who they were with the query: How would you describe yourself to yourself as you are in your life right now? Themes of nature (growth), family and spirituality were seen across the lifespan.