THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CHOOSING AMONG LIFE GOALS

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Donna M. Costello-Nickitas
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Adelphi University
The Marion A. Buckley School of Nursing
Donna M. Costello-Nickitas

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend acceptance of the dissertation.

Nancy Noel, RN, EdD, Associate Professor, Marion A. Buckley School of Nursing

Robert A. Abruzzese, MD, EdD, FAAN, Adjunct Associate Professor, Marion A. Buckley School of Nursing

Judy Ackerhalt, RN, EdD, Associate Professor, Marion A. Buckley School of Nursing

This dissertation is accepted by the Marion A. Buckley School of Nursing.

Jacqueline Rose Hott, RN, PhD, FAAN, Dean, The Marion A. Buckley School of Nursing

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Abstract

The Lived Experience of Choosing Among Life Goals:
A Phenomenological Study

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals. Seven married female administrators between the ages of 27-37 who were in middle management positions in two New York City metropolitan hospitals were invited to participate in the study. Subjects signed a consent form, filled in demographic data and were asked to provide a written description of a situation in which they found themselves choosing among life goals. No names were placed on the subjects' written descriptions. The written descriptions were returned directly to the investigator.

Giorgi's (1975) qualitative structural analytic method of phenomenology was used to analyze the written descriptions. This analysis generated a situated structural description for each subject which contained the meaning of the lived experience for that subject. The seven situated structural descriptions were synthesized into a general structural description, which was the meaning of the lived experience studied from the perspective of all the subjects.

The general structural description represents the answer to the research question "What is the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals for female
nurse administrators in middle management positions?" and is the major finding of this phenomenological investigation. The answer which emerged was: choosing among life goals is struggling to fulfill competing ambitions while experiencing paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, success-defeat, and security-insecurity in the process of affirming cherished beliefs.

Findings from the study, which used the principles of Parse's (1981) Man-Living-Health theory, agreed with that author's concepts of powering (struggling to fulfill competing ambitions), enabling-limiting (paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, success-defeat, and security-insecurity), and valuing (affirming cherished beliefs). From these and from the research findings, the following structure was developed: choosing among life goals is powering the enabling of valuing. This is reaching beyond the immediate moment through the pushing-resisting lived in the struggles and tensions of choosing a selected option in the hope of affirming beliefs.

The findings of this investigation support the value of the phenomenological method for nursing research, and the nursing theory Man-Living-Health (Parse, 1981). The results also reveal the importance of understanding more fully the structures and processes of decision-making.
Acknowledgments

Although this dissertation bears the name of only one author, Donna M. Costello-Nickitas, there have been many contributors whose intellectual and emotional support made this research possible.

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Gratitude and affection go to my dissertation committee whose insightful comments and questions challenged me to continually seek new and different ways to improve the quality of this dissertation. Many thanks to Nancy Noel, RN, EdD, Chair; Roberta Abruzzese, RN, EdD; and Judy Ackerhalt, RN, EdD, for their care, concern and compassion during this process.

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be a driving force, I am deeply grateful. The boundaries of human relationships are never fully understood until they are pushed and pulled by the flow of human need. Michael, many thanks for the freedom to stretch our relationship, often beyond reasonable boundaries.

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To my mother, Anna Costello, who taught me how valuable a parent can be, many thanks. There are no words to describe how appreciative I am for all those delicious dinners, clean clothes, and special moments of sharing with you over coffee all the fears, anxieties and challenges of my life.

To my sisters, Grace and Joanne, many thanks for believing in me and for assisting with "auntie" responsibilities. Truly, the completion of this research study is a collective effort of intellectual and emotional bonding with special people in a special way.

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FOREWORD

My interest in the topic of choice, choosing and, in particular, personal decision-making arose while I was working as a Clinical Assistant Director of Nursing. During that time, I gave much thought and consideration to planning my nursing career and establishing personal goals.

While analyzing my career aspirations I became familiar with women's literature, especially by women in administration (Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Harrigan, 1976; Hennig, 1970). In these readings and others (Kanter, 1977; McBroom, 1986) I observed that the authors were referring to females employed in male-dominated professions like business, medicine and the law rather than females employed in female-dominated professions like nursing, social work and teaching. I was prompted to wonder about the struggles and conflicts of females who assumed managerial positions in male-dominated enclaves such as hospitals, universities, and financial institutions.

My interest in the experiences of females who chose a female-dominated profession as opposed to those females who chose a male-dominated one led me to consider the experience of career choice in general. I began to realize that the values and beliefs that draw a person toward a particular career are embedded in an individual's personal and cultural history. And that these values are learned within a
familial and cultural milieu. "An important part of any culture is its system of symbolic representations of reality--the attribution of meaning to perceptions . . . . The perception of what is "out there" is based on the way one has learned to interpret reality" (Hunter College Women Studies Collective, 1983, p. 54).

While continuing to contemplate career aspirations and the role of women in administration, I enrolled in doctoral studies and had the opportunity to participate in a new course entitled "Feminist Paradigms: Implications for Nursing." During this course I explored and expanded my knowledge of feminist theory and research which lead to a deeper understanding of the effects of sexual discrimination and oppression as well as to a new sensitivity and insight into the history and experiences of women. This increased understanding of the importance of women's experiences in general led to a desire to understand the meaning of these experiences in relation to choice and personal decision-making. I learned that the phenomenon of decision-making could be revealed through qualitative research.

Thus, the development of my interest in the human experience of choosing among life goals occurred over a period of time, beginning with my clinical experience as an Assistant Director of Nursing, continuing with my exposure to new and different ways of viewing science from a feminist perspective and, most recently, in my work as a nurse-
educator, preparing graduate students to be middle managers in nursing service administration.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Choosing among life goals is a common human experience surfacing from the human-environment interrelationship. "Man is an open being, more than and different from the sum of parts in mutual simultaneous interchange with the environment who chooses from options and bears responsibility for choices" (Parse, 1987, p. 160). In choosing among life goals, individuals select a specific option, a unique way of being in a situation.

Inherent in the process of choosing among life goals is the struggle or conflict of affirming one's values, hopes and dreams. Often, important life decisions involve consideration of the risks, demands, and opportunities presented by the selected option. Most choices call for a pushing and persisting until a decision is made. Decisions are often difficult and unique.

To change and grow as adults--to be able to transform or transcend the recurrent moments of stagnation, confinement or aborted promise . . . depends upon a sense of purpose, the feeling of being in control of our lives, in a position to make choices that will work over a lifetime in such a way that identity is extended, elaborated and renewed in patterns . . . that are both fruitful and feasible. (Barnett, 1975, p. 163).
Philosophical Perspectives

In the search for new knowledge and answers to questions, each investigator selects a perspective or worldview which best describes his/her interests and beliefs. For this study, the perspectives arise from a set of assumptions emerging from existentialism and phenomenology. The existential-phenomenological tenets and concepts include intentionality, human subjectivity, coexistence and situated freedom. These tenets and concepts are all relevant to the meaning of what it is like to choose and live chosen ideals and cherished beliefs in the process of becoming.

Existentialists understand human existence "as not merely static being, always the same, but as becoming, continually changing, developing" (Misiak & Sexton, 1973, p. 73). This means that a person is open, knows, and is present to the world. Heidegger (1962) states "to be human, then, is to be intentional and to be involved with the world through a fundamental nature of knowing, being present and open." Thus, individuals are involved with the world in creating the self-project of personal becoming. Marcel (1956) believes that every person finds him/herself in given situations, which constitutes the person's existence. Marcel further states that human existence is goal-directed. "The specifically human task which confronts each person is to pass from existence, which is passively received, to being, which man's freedom must conquer" (Clemence, 1966,
p. 342). Here the tenet of human subjectivity suggests that a conscious person by nature is no-thing but rather a unity of being and non-being (Heidegger, 1962).

In seeking ways to live chosen life goals, a person strives towards a sense of purpose, a feeling of being. According to Sartre (1966), what characterizes a person's best is his/her freedom and capability of choice. "One chooses, and what one chooses determines what one becomes. One literally makes oneself through one's choices in life (Stevens, 1984, p. 219). A person is responsible for shaping his/her very being, for becoming the person he/she will eventually be." Therefore, choosing among life goals is an experience which reflects individual choices as a person selects an option and affirms a certain way of being. Consequently, according to Marcel (1956), a person's courageous choices will result in personal growth, fuller human stature, and greater participation in being and becoming.

In an attempt to grasp the meaning of what it is like to choose and live chosen ideals and cherished beliefs in the process of becoming, a phenomenological research method was selected. This method is directed towards uncovering a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences. It asks "What is this or that kind of experience like?" Giorgi (1971) states "that if we are to know the full meaning of any behavior we must consider it in light of the experiential
context of the participating subject. In other words, the latter must be taken into account if the former is to be fully understood" (p. 54).

By illuminating the lived values of female nurse administrators as they make personal decisions, new meaning about the intersubjective process of choosing among life goals will be uncovered. Solley and Murphy (1960) suggest that "an individual can introspect upon perception and, by doing so, discover his/her idiosyncratic perceptual world" (p. 23). In this way an individual's world perspective is formed. This is not a pure experience of world but an interpreted experience that constitutes reality. For Merleau-Ponty (1964), "the perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all values and all existence" (p. 13). A perception cannot be made into a collection of sensations, because "in it the whole is prior to the parts—and this whole is not an ideal whole" (p. 15).

**Statement of Purpose**

This study will investigate the meaning of the lived experience, choosing among life goals, for female nurse administrators in middle management positions. The objective is to uncover a structural description of the process. This description unfolds through a systematic analysis and synthesis of subjects' descriptions which express their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. It is from the
analysis and synthesis of subjects' descriptions that the
essences of the phenomenon are revealed.

**Phenomenon of Choosing Among Life Goals**

A phenomenon is a circumstance or event that can be studied and is the central focus of the study (Parse, Coyne, & Smith, 1985). The phenomenon of choosing among life goals is a lived experience, that is, the "choosing" structures the "experience" which constitutes a person's life. "Living, being, experiencing, perceiving are all nothing without the world that is lived, experienced or perceived" (Munhall & Oiler, 1986, p. 59). Being-in-the-world is expressed in life choices, lived values.

Values are cherished beliefs which are created within the environment which embodies a person's being. As a person participates with the environment in creating and becoming, he/she is free to choose meaning in a situation and bears responsibility for choices in life situations. Choices, then, are a person's "stand toward the emergent desires and feelings evolving in situations. They are made without full knowledge of the outcomes yet with full responsibility of the consequences" (Parse, 1981, p. 21).

The need to choose in light of uncertainty calls for a leap into the unknown, the forging of new values and new existences (Stevens, 1984). What an individual chooses is what gives structure and meaning to his/her world (Hall, 1976). It is in choosing and living by chosen ideals that an
individual is open and free to be an authentic person—willing to use his/her freedom to accept responsibility toward existence.

Rationale of the Study

Tesch (1987) suggests that phenomenological researchers choose topics for investigation in which they are interested and which have special significance for them. Phenomenologists study an experience because "they have become deeply involved with the phenomenon. It is something at the center of their personal or professional interests, and therefore they know a lot about it at a human level" (p. 236).

Keen (1975) states, "The lived experience must be our guide in understanding other people and what things mean to them" (p. 21). He goes on to describe being-in-the-world as "where we are most fundamentally, and . . . that orientation to the world is the most basic horizon from which I derive meaning for my experience" (p. 23). Knowledge about the experience of choosing among life goals for women is important. Women have been socialized from childhood through adulthood to choose among a number of desired goals, often at the expense of self. Knowing about the phenomenon of choosing among life goals will enrich the understanding of the benefits of the choice as well as the cost of what is forgone. Information on the struggles and conflicts of choosing will offer new insights into how women confront social and cultural demands to live life goals.
Baruch, Barnett, and Rivers, (1983) state that "the details of women's lives remain unclear . . . . It has been difficult to get rich, reliable information about which paths lead to a rich, satisfying life" (p. 15). "The perspectives and visions of women have developed from culturally and historically engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood with little, if any, attention given to the modes of learning, knowing and valuing that may be specific to, or at least common in, women" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, & Tarule, 1986, p. 6).

Through phenomenological descriptions given by female nurse administrators, the investigator will seek to identify the occurrences of any common themes related to life decisions, specifically the risks, demands and opportunities of selecting one option over another. Most importantly, the meaning of what it is like to choose among life goals will be uncovered.

Nurses cannot treat persons in their totality if they are unaware of themselves in their totality (Mayberry, 1980, p. 18). Wilson (1974) sees the nurse's personal, human self "as the critical dimension that requires nurturance and development" (p. 415). She further elaborates that "nurses must gain competencies in 1) self-knowledge, 2) critical distance and 3) integration of life experiences if they are to face the many stressful situations inherent in their profession" (p. 415).
Because the nurse administrator is required to act as a role model to other nurses, it is important for her to be keenly aware that she is responsible for helping those under her leadership develop in their professional roles. For female nurses who are just starting to make crucial choices in their lives or for those who have made choices but wonder about veering off in new and different directions, sharing the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals can help others consider their futures.

Levenstein (1983) believes that decision-making, or choosing among alternatives, is "the essence of the managerial role" and notes that, for managers who are also professionals, like nurses, the number of choices to be made increases substantially. The number of decisions continues to increase as the manager moves up the organizational ladder.

Young and Hayne (1988) state that "a large part of the middle manager's job is dealing with interpersonal issues . . . as well as [making] the decisions themselves" (p. 138). In her job, the middle manager is involved in formulating decisions and goals that are conceptual and broad in nature as compared with the more technical, hands-on and short-term decisions of a first line manager. But the effect of her decisions is still more immediate than those of the top manager who deals with strategic and long-term planning. While skillful decision-making, the ability to choose wisely among alternatives, is necessary for all
managerial levels of the organization, it is particularly so for the middle manager. Therefore, middle managers provide a more interesting group for study than first line managers.

Additionally, middle managers are usually at a point in their careers where there is a lot of pressure on them to consider their own needs, as well as the needs of others, whether those needs are personal or professional. McBride (1985c) suggests that nurses must understand the responsibility of career development. "This means having a sense of how stages of family life fit in with stages of professional development" (p. 247) when orchestrating a career. This is critical for middle managers who are of childbearing age and must weigh career advancement and other alternatives against family obligations.

Baruch et al. (1983) noted that "not all life choice decisions are a matter of deliberate choice, but to make informed decisions when choice is possible women need to know about the lives of other women who have made similar choices, about how their lives turned out" (p. 24). The findings from this study will help reveal the realities of women's lives, the tension and stresses of choice, the conflicts of selecting an option for personal satisfaction and growth.

Some authors suggest that today, more than ever before, many women are free to challenge social definitions of femininity, cultural norms, economic and social
circumstances (Kanter, 1977; McBride, 1987a; McBroom, 1987; Rix, 1987). A sharing of the choices and decisions made by female nurse administrators will lead to a better understanding of the contemporary choices shaping their lives. From the descriptions of female nurse administrators, new knowledge will be generated about contemporary choices—the opportunities, incentives and constraints. This knowledge will provide rich, reliable data about how women take responsibility for their decisions, pursue, preserve, and achieve their life goals. Knowledge about lived experiences will benefit nurses' understanding and support for individuals who wish to exercise control and choice over their own personal decision making.

In attempting to discover and account for the presence of meaning in the stream of consciousness of the seven female subjects, it is important to know that "all human behavior is understood in terms of the subject's orientation in the world, and is an expression of that perception" (Oiler, 1982, p. 179). Therefore, while reflecting back on the experience of choosing, that which one uncovers is not a pure experience but rather a remembered experience. The subjects' reflective disclosures of their personal decision-making is determined by their history—all previous experiences. These experiences are a part of the person in relation to his or her world. Thus, the subjects' descriptions
reflect their attitudes toward fulfilling emergent desires as they evolve from life situations.

"Since the perceived world or lived reality underlies scientific explanation, and since human experience is the focus of concern in nursing practice, some means of describing lived experience in nursing situations is a paramount need in nursing research" (Munhall & Oiler, 1986, p. xiv).
Belenky et al. (1986) note that when the woman's voice is included in the study of human experience, women's lives and qualities are revealed. "When scientific findings, scientific theory . . . are reexamined through the lens of women's perspectives and values, new conclusions can be drawn and new directions forged that have implications for the lives of both men and women" (p. 8).

Research Question

What is the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals for female nurse administrators in middle management positions?
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature contained in this chapter was made prior to data collection and analysis. It represents an overview of literature that was important to understanding women's experience of decision-making.

A review of additional literature, made after data collection and analysis, appears in Chapter V, Discussion of Findings. The focus of that review is the reporting of significant theoretical material and research studies pertinent to the findings of this study.

The original review revealed that there has been no research published which describes the essential structure of personal decision-making from an existential-phenomenological perspective. To date, there have been no phenomenological studies published specifically on the lived experience of choosing among life goals. However, the words "choice," "choosing" and "decision-making" abound in the literature when linked with such terms as "multiple role," "career development," "problem-solving," "management personnel," "professional development," "reproduction" and "occupational choices." It appears that most of the literature on women's choices refers to lifestyle choices surrounding family and work. Without labeling the types or kinds of life choices that might be selected by the sample, or the meaning given
to those life choices, it is obvious from the literature that career and family choices are important to women (Baruch, Barnett, & Rivers, 1983; Corder & White-Stephan, 1983; Gerson, 1985; McBride, 1987a; Schorr & Zimmerman, 1988).

In recent years there has been considerable interest in the ways individuals balance and integrate their entire life career. For example, Rapoport and Rapoport (1980) describe the combination of work, family, and leisure. Sundby (1980) considers the career quad of self, marriage, family, and career. Farmer (1978) found that homemaking priorities tended to diminish female career motivation. She also found that moderate levels of homemaking commitment could coexist with high levels of career commitment in females. Individual differences in role priorities are shaped by socialization processes.

Women who choose a career-accommodating life-style are faced with the greatest potential for role conflict (Myers, 1984; Pistrang, 1984; Regan & Roland, 1985; Zappert & Weinstein 1985). Nearly 70% of working women have children under 18 years, and 49% of them have children under one year (Mahoney, 1986).

McBride (1987a) suggests that "nurses urge that role conflict/role burden be investigated as a major source of stress for young and middle-aged women, now that the majority of women expect to combine work outside the home
with that of family" (p. 41). The amount of stress might vary depending upon the degree of family care responsibilities, resources available, and the needs of the care giver and other family members. For single-parent families, in particular, where the mother was solely responsible for care and there were few resources available, the situation was found to be difficult and stressful (Burden, 1986; Duffy, 1986; Hill, 1986).

Thoits (1986) recognized that the symptoms of mental stress increased significantly when parenting young children is combined with employment outside the home; but parenting teenagers can be equally stressful (McBride, 1987b; Menaghan, 1983; Rossi, 1980). During their children's adolescence, mothers are faced with the burden of managing generational tensions as well as the stresses associated with their occupational role (McDermott et al., 1987).

Choosing to combine multiple roles has been found to offer some benefits to women. Studies report that women who have had multiple roles—career, husband and children—were found to be the healthiest (Verbrugge, 1983; Baruch et al., 1983). It is essential for women to examine their lives and determine just what choices to make.

Career theorists have acknowledged the impact of early childhood experiences (Ginsburg, Ginsburg, Axelrad & Herma, 1951; Roe, 1957; Super, 1953). Cole and Hanson (1975) raised the question of whether socialization or opportunity
are dominant in determining the range of careers in which an individual will find satisfaction. O'Neil, Meeker, and Borgers (1978) developed a model of the career choice process for women, which incorporated the concepts of sex discrimination and supply and demand among the socio-economic factors which are hypothesized to affect the career choice process. In their model, socialization and sex-role learning was hypothesized to affect the career choice process through self-concept and vocational sex role. Farmer (1978) hypothesized that the socialization process, discrimination, and the support provided by the social context are all environmental factors that contribute to career motivation in women.

Gottfredson (1981) suggests that gender-role dictates the expectations for career and work behavior. This focus reveals the continual reverberation between the self and the other, between the micro (personal) and macro (public) sphere of influence. Gluckstern (1977) suggests that feminist counselors encourage clients to understand the social and environmental forces impinging upon them, to articulate their own responsibility in the situation and to act for personal and institutional change.

In *Hard choices: How women decide about work, career, and motherhood*, Gerson (1985) explores the relationship between women's work and family decisions by taking a close look at the life histories of a group of homemakers, working mothers,
and childless workers. In the life history analysis of sixty-three women Gerson examined how women selected their life paths through a series of decisions over the course of their lives in response to the opportunities and constraints posed by their immediate social environments (p. 42).

Women's decisions for or against motherhood and for or against committed work ties developed out of a negotiated process whereby they confront and respond to constraints and opportunities, often unanticipated, encountered over the course of their lives. The process is dynamic, not stable and fixed. It depends on how women define and perceive their situations as well as on the objective circumstances that structure these perceptions. Because the structural arrangements that channel women's motivations, perceptions, and behavior are ambiguous and contradictory, decision making involves a difficult struggle to define and act on situational interests. (Gerson, 1985, p. 213).

Research which addresses life decisions focuses upon the process by which overall lifestyle decisions are made. None focuses on the meaning of the actual experience. One quantitative study by Baruch, Barnett, and Rivers (1983) examined how and in what ways the major areas of life affect women's sense of well-being. The investigators asked women between the ages of 35-55 to discuss their "lifeprints"--the pleasures, problems, and conflicts surrounding work,
marriage, homemaking, children, parents, finances, and sexuality. The findings of this study reveal that young women today worry more about their future than those in the past; younger women in particular are faced with options and dilemmas surrounding life choices such as career, marriage and childbearing that did not exist for most women twenty years ago.

Corder and White-Stephan (1984) suggest that women's occupational choices involve a two-part process through which overall life style decisions are made. In the first stage, women make a decision about the way in which they will combine family and work roles; in the second stage, a specific occupation is chosen. The first stage of decision-making was explored by examining, via a 50-minute classroom-administered questionnaire, the aspirations of adolescent females for combining marriage, motherhood, and labor force participation, and the aspirations of adolescent males for their future wives' choices in these matters. The sample included 948 students in grades 8-12. The data from this study suggest that, indeed, sex-role socialization is important in females' life style choices. The relative importance of sex-role variables and the relative lack of importance of background, significant other and achievement variables in the aspiration models for males and females highlights the importance of sex-role socialization in the choice of a life style.
The only nursing-related literature that addressed personal choice is Schorr and Zimmerman's (1988) *Making choices, taking chances: Nurse leaders tell their story.* The book contains forty-six biographies of contemporary leaders. These personal biographies address the consequences of decisions made by nurse leaders in pursuing their ideas, careers, and goals. The nurse leaders describe their personal joys and sorrows as well as their professional successes and failures. Most of the stories contain either childhood influences, critical life events, or significant professional experiences that have impacted the life choices of the contemporary nurse leaders. For example, Jeanne Quint Benoliel describes "being born at the end of World War I, and growing up in a period in which girls were socialized to believe that their primary roles in life were to be wives and mothers. Career expectations for women were generally traditional, such as nursing or teaching" (Benoliel, 1988, cited in Schorr & Zimmerman, 1988, p. 16).

The nursing literature found to be most significant to any discussion of the phenomenon of choosing among life goals is Parse's *Man-Living-Health* (1981). Parse's theory is grounded in the human sciences. It synthesizes Rogers's (1971) principles and concepts about human beings with major tenets and concepts from existential-phenomenological thought. From the author's theory of nursing (1981, 1987),
three major principles or themes emerge: transcendence, rhythmicity and meaning.

Transcendence is the way an individual interacts with his or her environment to reach beyond and propel into the future, to create and affirm self. As a result of multidimensional experiences and the contexts of situations, opportunities arise from which alternatives are chosen. Opportunities become actual choices. These create other possibilities and, in this way, an individual powers new ways of being. Being confronts non-being as one risks losing self to achieve chosen ideals and beliefs.

Rhythmicity refers to an unfolding cadence (timing) of an individual's way of being in the world. These ways of being are lived rhythmically and all at once in a situation. This means that there are opposite rhythmic patterns present simultaneously. A person choosing commitment to an ideal or belief simultaneously gives up another possible commitment.

Meaning represents what one experiences and understands while living in the world. It refers to how one develops a worldview and constructs a personal reality. This personal reality contains all that a person is, has been and will become.

From these three themes of Man-Living-Health come three major concepts: powering, enabling-limiting, and valuing, all of which are meaningful to understanding the lived experience of choosing among life goals.
The first concept, power, is the affirming of self in light of the potential of non-being; it is fundamental being (Winkler, 1983). Power is only in its actualization. It is the possibility of self-affirmation in spite of internal and external negotiations (Tillich, 1954, p. 14). Parse (1981) describes power as a concept of the principle of cotranscending with the possibles. "Powering is a continuous rhythmical process incarnating one's intentions and actions in moving toward possibilities" (Dilthey, 1961, p. 110). Pushing-resisting is the rhythm of powering. "Pushing-resisting is present in every human encounter, creating tension and conflict that create alternatives from which one can choose in reaching beyond. Tension is the struggling between pushing and resisting while contending with other issues, ideas, desires and hopes" (Parse, 1981, p. 58).

When a choice is made, the pushing-resisting tension and emerging conflicts create possibilities and opportunities for new choices and for affirming self. Powering is an energizing force, and Tillich (1952) suggests that to be is the power to exist. Powering is lived in relation to one's view of a life situation, and to one's values, beliefs or goals in that situation. Powering is a process of choosing to be a certain way in a situation, thus transforming what one is to become (Parse, 1987). Powering, the enabling and limiting of valuing, is reaching beyond the immediate moment
through the pushing-resisting tension and emerging conflicts to create possibilities for chosen goals and for affirming self.

The second concept, enabling-limiting, is a rhythmical process recognized as one chooses a particular direction which by nature limits other directions. In every choice, there are an infinite number of possibilities and also an infinite number of limitations. Certain potentialities of the person are actualized at the same time as others are denied (Winkler, 1983, p. 282). In choosing among life goals, one powers the enabling-limiting of choice in a way that reflects one's desires to reach a possible with oneself—a living out of personal dreams, goals and values. "One cannot be all possibilities at once, and, in choosing, one is both enabled and limited" (Parse, 1981, p. 53).

Valuing, the process of confirming cherished beliefs, the third concept in the researcher's perspective, is a concept related to structuring meaning multidimensionally (Parse, 1981). Valuing mirrors the person's worldview (belief system) as it arises in relationships with the environment (Winkler, 1983, p. 218). The powering of enabling-limiting in choosing among life goals emerges through one's valuing. Values create one's reality by guiding the direction of choice, giving the choice meaning. Hall (1976) says "to value is to make a choice and act upon it. The choices and acts of one's life constitute one's history. But as one
chooses and acts on values, one also seeks meaning; meaning and valuing are for all intents and purposes aspects of the same reality" (p. 3). One's beliefs in choosing among life goals enable and limit one in the struggle with decisions to affirm personal beliefs. Parse (1981) describes choosing as being integrated into one's value system, which is a matrix of principles and ideas that guides one's life. The valuing process includes what Raths, Harmin, and Simon (1978) call key activities: choosing freely, prizing one's choices and acting upon them. An attitude or belief becomes a value for a person when the person incorporates it into a personal belief system. The valuing process reflected in choosing among life goals is the way a person chooses to be in a situation cocreated by a personal view and the context of a situation.

Choosing among life goals is a way of powering the enabling-limiting of valuing (Parse, 1981). This is reaching beyond the immediate moment through the pushing-resisting lived in the struggles and tensions of choosing a selected option in the hopes of affirming valued beliefs. Thus, in this choosing, a person decides to be a certain way in the situation and experiences both the opportunities and limitations of the choice.
Summary

There is ample literature demonstrating that career and family decisions are of concern to women. Extensive demographic research has examined the interaction of age, gender, marital status, care-giving obligations and employment. There have been no studies, however, which have shed light on the relationship of any of the above-stated variables to the meaning of personal decision-making or life choices.

To discover and account for the meaning of human experiences, Parse, Coyne and Smith (1985) suggest that qualitative studies be conducted. The focus of qualitative research is on descriptions which have as their primary emphasis the thoughts, perceptions and feelings of subjects about lived experiences (p.2). The qualitative approach offers an opportunity for the researcher to uncover the meaning of these experiences which is not possible in quantitative research.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used to uncover the meaning of choosing among life goals through the in-depth study of subjects' written descriptions. Included in this section are: a description of the research method, criteria for subject selection, the data gathering procedure, the procedure for protection of subjects' rights, the data analysis procedure, the limitations, validity and reliability, and description of the findings.

Research Method

The phenomenological method is a rigorous inductive process which seeks to describe human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). The distinctive feature of the phenomenological method rests in its ability to discover knowledge through immediate human experience.

"Phenomenological research attempts to enter the conceptual world of its subjects in order to understand how and what meanings people construct around events in their daily lives" (Gertz, 1973, p. 6). The task of phenomenology is "the reflective-descriptive explication, analysis, and assessment of the life of consciousness, and of man generally" (Zaner, 1970, p. 122). To obtain the worldview of the subjects, the researcher must hold in abeyance any personal
assumptions about the experience. Valle and King (1978) describe bracketing or phenomenological reductions as setting aside one's preconceptions to more fully understand the meaning of the phenomenon to the individual involved in the experience. Zaner (1970) clarifies this by stating that "one's method must always conform to the actual structures of the phenomenon being investigated, reading nothing else into it" (p. 172).

Keen (1975) suggests that an investigator opens him or herself fully to the phenomenon as it presents itself and sets aside any preconceptions about the meaning of the experience; "the researcher must find a way to evoke descriptions from his/her co-researcher (co-researcher refers to subject) that will tell him/her what she wants to know, without telling his/her co-researcher what to say" (p. 58). Omery (1983) affirms "that to ensure that the phenomenon is being investigated as it truly appears or is experienced, the researcher must approach the phenomenon with no preselected theoretical framework" (p. 50).

We want not to see this event as an example of this or that theory; we want to see it as a phenomenon in its own right, with its own meaning and structure. Anybody can hear words that were spoken; to listen for meanings as they eventually emerged from the event as a whole is to have adopted an attitude of openness to the phenomenon in its inherent meaningfulness. (Keen, 1975, p. 108)
Phenomenology, then, strives to understand the total meaning that an experience has for an individual by entering into his/her field of perception, in order to see life as the individual sees it (Bruyn, 1966).

Parse et al. (1985) observed that "qualitative research identifies the characteristics and the significance of human experiences as described by subjects and interpreted by the researcher at various levels of abstraction" (p. 3). Thus, subjects' descriptions expressed in ordinary language will be systematically transformed to the language of science. The qualitative approach of phenomenology offers an opportunity to uncover the meaning of choosing among life goals as a lived phenomenon.

In phenomenological research, the study sample is drawn from a population living the experience of the phenomenon. For phenomenological studies 2-10 subjects are an adequate number. Adequacy of the sample is obtained when the investigator experiences redundancy in the description. Redundancy is repetition of statements regarding the phenomenon under study (Parse et al., 1985, p. 18). Data gathering using the Giorgi modification analysis method, consists of lengthy and detailed written descriptions. Because of the length and the breadth of the description, the sample is usually small.

For the human sciences, it is not necessary that a phenomenon to be investigated be duplicated identically
(even if that were possible) but simply that its essential theme can be identified through its varying manifestations. To demand that the essential theme of a phenomenon and its manifestation be constant is an unnecessary reduction that not only does violence to the phenomenon, but also prohibits a correct understanding of it because the various ways it manifests itself also shed light on its essential nature. (Giorgi, 1971, p. 24)

Study Sample

The sample consisted of married female nurse administrators between the ages of 27-37 years who are in middle management positions in two New York City metropolitan hospitals. (See Table #1: Demographic Data for Subjects.)

Selection of Subjects

A list of female middle managers employed by each facility was reviewed by the Assistant Director of Research. Those who were between the ages of 27-37 were identified; their ten names were forwarded to the investigator. All were invited to participate in the study. One of these was forced to withdraw because of illness, one felt uncomfortable about disclosing personal matters and also withdrew, and a third proved unable to provide usable information. The seven remaining subjects expressed their ideas in written English.
Table 1

Demographic Data for Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Age of children</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Years in middle mgmt.</th>
<th>Income (in thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Rom. Cath.</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>A.A.S.</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>$50-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Prot.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Rom. Cath.</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>B.S.N.</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>75-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Prot.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>A.A.S.</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>50-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>100-125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Rom. Cath.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A.A.S.</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>75-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Rom. Cath.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>B.S.N.</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All subjects were married.

W = white; B = black.
Protecting the Rights of Human Subjects

In accordance with Adelphi University Doctoral Program requirements, an application was submitted to the "Human Subjects Review Committee" for permission to conduct the research. In addition, permission was requested from and granted by the Nursing Research Committee at each of the two metropolitan hospitals. Subjects were invited to respond in writing and orally, and their responses serve as the data for the study. The purpose of the study was discussed with potential subjects. A signed consent form was obtained from each subject which identified the researcher, briefly explained the nature of study, and ensured confidentiality and anonymity as well as the subject's right to withdraw from the study (Appendix A). In addition, subjects were informed that they might be asked to elaborate some portions of their descriptions.

To ensure confidentiality, no names were placed on the subjects' written descriptions. Each subject was assigned an identification number. Only the researcher had access to the material which keyed identification numbers with names of subjects. Subjects were informed that descriptions published would have no names associated with the data.

Data Gathering

The phenomenological research method involves retrospective descriptions of lived experiences. The question to the subjects leads them to reflect on and
describe a situation or circumstance in which the experience occurred and is presently remembered (Parse, 1985, p. 18). After receiving a short explanation, subjects were invited by the investigator to participate in the study (Appendix B). The subjects were asked to write a description in response to the following statement:

Describe a situation in which you experienced choosing among life goals. The situation may have occurred in one moment in time or it may have occurred over a longer period. Share your thoughts and feelings until you have no more to say about the situation.

No attempt was made to influence the type of situation the subjects described so that the description reflected their own personal perspective. The subjects were given one week to complete the description. Written descriptions were returned to the investigator.

Data Analysis

The Giorgi (1975) qualitative structural analytic method was used by the investigator to uncover the meaning of choosing among life goals. According to Giorgi (1975), "Phenomenology is the study of the structure, the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which any thing, event, or person appears" (p. 83). It is in the data analysis that the subjects' naive and concrete descriptions of the phenomenon yield an abstract yet authentic structural description of the phenomenon. Structure is the term used
to describe the answer to the "what is" question which
guides the research; in this study the "what is" question is
"What is the structural description of the lived experience
of choosing among life goals?" Giorgi's (1975) method of
analysis yields structural constituents of a phenomenon.
This method reveals what a phenomenon means for the
experiencing person; it uncovers the foundational
characteristics and structural nature of the experience.

The phenomenological analytic process suggested by Giorgi
includes a thorough in-depth study of subjects' descriptions.
The steps include: 1) dwelling with the description;
2) returning to the subject for elaboration of ambiguous areas
of descriptions; 3) identifying natural meaning unit;
4) identifying themes; 5) identifying focal meanings;
6) synthesizing of situated structural description, and
7) synthesizing of a general structural description.

1. Dwelling with the description

In an attempt to analyze the data, the investigator reads
each description in a quiet and reflective manner. Parse et
al. (1985) refer to this process as contemplative dwelling.
This is the "undistracted reading and re-reading of the
description with the intent to uncover the meaning of the
lived experience for the subject" (p. 19). In contemplative
dwelling, the investigator is open to tacit and explicit
meanings in the data.
2. Returning to the subject for elaboration of ambiguous areas of descriptions

The investigator reads each description several times in order to obtain the essences of the description and to identify areas within the description where more information is required. The investigator then returns to each subject asking them to elaborate on these areas. The elaborated descriptions are taped, transcribed, and inserted into the original descriptions where they appear in brackets.

Having obtained the elaborated descriptions, the investigator studies each description through the processes of intuiting, analyzing, and describing. These processes are closely related and, though discrete, occur simultaneously (Parse et al., 1985). "Intuiting is the process of coming to know the phenomenon as it shows itself in the descriptions of subjects. The idea of intuiting is to grasp the uniqueness of the phenomenon by openly looking, listening and feeling" (Parse et al., 1985). Spiegelberg (1976) offers some help in the attempt to grasp the uniqueness of specific phenomena, suggesting that the researcher compare and contrast them with related phenomena, giving special attention to similarities and differences.

"Analyzing is the strict intentional tracing of the elements and structure of the phenomenon revealed through intuiting. It is an attempt to uncover the constitutional elements of the phenomenon in order to come to know the whole of it, to shape its meaning as a lived experience"
(Parse et al., 1985). Phenomenological analyzing involves "the structure of the phenomena according to their ingredients and their configuration" (Spiegelberg, 1976, p. 671).

"Describing is the process of affirming a connection between the phenomenon and everything which is denoted or connoted by way of the terms used in references to it" (Spiegelberg, 1976, p. 673). The aim of this describing process is to communicate, to guide the listener by giving distinctive guideposts to the phenomenon (Oiler, 1986). Describing focuses attention on the major characteristics of the phenomenon so as to identify it.

In the process of investigating the phenomenon through intuiting, analyzing, and describing, the investigator examines each description for natural meaning units, themes, focal meanings and a situated structural description.

3. Identifying natural meaning unit

The investigator dwells with each description so as to perceive transitions, the flow of meanings conveyed by the subjects' words, by letting his/her expressions announce points within the body of the written descriptions where the emphasis of meaning shifts. Natural meaning units occur whenever the investigator perceives a change of meaning or a psychologically sensitive situation for the subject.

The natural meaning units found in the elaborated description begin and end a thought, and are identified in the subject's words. Each natural meaning unit in the
description reveals something about the nature of the experience.

4. Identifying themes

From each natural meaning unit a theme emerges. Emerging themes are the central elements of the natural meaning unit. The investigator paraphrases the subject's words from the natural meaning unit into a central idea or theme. The investigator reduces the words of the subject to the simplest configuration which remains true to the meaning of the original, thereby identifying the themes of each natural meaning unit (Giorgi, 1975, p. 74-75; Parse et al., 1985, p. 24).

5. Identifying focal meanings

Themes translate into focal meanings. A focal meaning is the crystallization of the theme, which is written in the language of the investigator and shifts to a higher level of abstraction of the theme. This is accomplished by having the investigator restate the meaning expressed in the naive words of the subject into the scientific language of the investigator. This transformation takes place through a process of reflection and imaginative variation. The investigator begins to reflect on possibilities and imagines the appearance of the phenomenon against the background of various meanings of experience in an attempt to determine what this phenomenon means (Giorgi, 1985). Here the
investigator must be extremely careful so as to remain true to the meaning of the subject's original words. The investigator's task is to avoid the categorizing of the phenomenon in the context of a known theory, concept, or personal preconception (Keen, 1975).

6. **Synthesizing of situated structural description**

   Focal meanings translate into a structural description for each subject's description of the phenomenon, which reflects the meaning of the phenomenon. Here, the investigator synthesizes and integrates the insights contained in all the focal meanings into a consistent statement regarding the subject's experience. This descriptive statement (or summary) contains the individual and personal components of the experience for that subject. It maintains the specific and individual features of the personal context within which the experience occurred.

7. **Synthesizing of a general structural description**

   From the situated structural descriptions of the phenomena of the subjects, the investigator synthesizes a general structural description. This general description, or general structure, "leaves out the particulars of the specific situation and centers on those aspects of the experience . . . that have emerged which, while not necessarily universal, are at least trans-situational or more than specific" (Giorgi, 1975, p. 88). It is comprised of the
essential, non-redundant structural constituents which emerge from the situated structural statements of each subject. The general structural description describes the nature of the phenomenon of the female nurse administrator's experiences of choosing among life goals. Giorgi (1975) explains that "the obtained situated descriptions are relevant for idiographic concerns, and the general descriptions are mostly relevant for theoretical contexts" (p. 103). The general structural description represents the answer to the research question of the study.

Limitations

The sample consisted of married female nurse administrators between the ages of 27-37 years who were employed as middle managers in two large teaching hospitals in the New York City metropolitan area.

Validity and Reliability

The issue of establishing validity and reliability in phenomenological research lies in discovering and accounting for the presence of meaning. Giorgi (1975) explains that "most scientific research looks for a method of measuring a phenomenon and then tries to assess the meaning of the measurement. In phenomenology, the meaning is the measurement—you get directly to the meaning of the phenomenon by a method that systematically explores meaning directly without going through the measurement process in the strict sense of
the term" (p.101). Phenomenology seeks to compare and
describe; it does not measure. The research must adhere to
the method if layers of human experience are to be understood
and uncovered (Mayberry, 1980).

Keen (1975) suggests that, in phenomenology, the basis
for judging the validity of any phenomenon is found to be
the lived experience. Mayberry (1980) believes that it is
here that the phenomenological research method has its
strength: its findings are verifiable even by those who
know nothing about the science of phenomenology, because the
validity of the description rests on the completeness of the
description and how much it speaks to the essence of the
lived experience.

The test of validity for uncovering the meaning of
human phenomena emerging from a phenomenological description
includes using the following list of criteria established by
Keen (1975) for a valid description:

vividness—the description has a clearness, a livedness
that draws us into it, so that we can relate to it;

accuracy—the description reveals us to ourselves in
such a way that we recognize ourselves;

richness—the description is dense, thick, and captures
the complexity of the experience;

elegance—amid the complexity, the description shows us
a simplicity and order (p. 71).
Psathas (1973) suggests that a successful description directs others besides the researcher to validate the description through their own experience of the phenomenon, actual or potential, and that the test of validity resides in the reader. The reader must ask the following question: would the findings be recognized as true by those who lived the experience? If the reader's experience is potential, the test is whether he/she can empathize with the subject's experience and find it to be true after only reading the description of it.

Thus the chief point to be remembered in using the phenomenological research method is "not whether another position with respect to the data could be adopted, but whether a reader, adopting the same view point as articulated by the researcher, can also see what this researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it" (Giorgi, 1975, p. 96). In the following chapter, the subjects' descriptions are presented and interpreted by the researcher to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals.

**Description of the Findings**

The major findings which emerged from this investigation are presented in Chapter IV, Data Analysis, and Chapter V, Discussion of Findings. In Chapter IV, separate sections present each subject's own description of the phenomena in natural meaning units. Each natural meaning unit is
followed by the themes and focal meanings discerned by the researcher. These illustrate the procedure followed, from the subject's original descriptions to the situated structural description at the end of each section. The general structural description, which appears at the conclusion of the data analysis, is a synthesis of the seven situated structural descriptions. The discussion of findings in Chapter V examines the foregoing process.
CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Data for this study consist of the written retrospective descriptions of the experience of choosing among life goals provided by seven female nurse administrators. The analysis of data was accomplished in a manner consistent with the Giorgi (1975) modification as described in the preceding chapter on methodology.

Results of all analytical operations for all data are presented in the following sections of the chapter. The subjects' elaborated descriptions are divided into natural meaning units, themes, focal meanings and a situated structural description. The development of each theme which is inherent in each natural meaning unit is described in the language of the subject. As the investigator studied each theme, new meanings surfaced to create the focal meanings. The transition from themes to focal meanings occurs through a shift in the level of discourse to the abstract. For each description, focal meanings are synthesized into a situated structural description which reflects the meaning of the phenomenon from the perspective of the subject but is written in the language of the investigator. The seven situated descriptions are synthesized into a general structural description which is the meaning of the phenomenon as it evolved from the lived experience of all seven subjects.

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The elaborations on the original descriptions are presented in brackets ([]), to differentiate them from the subjects' parenthetical phrases (()). within the elaborated descriptions, parenthetical material is presented in braces ({}). The elaborated descriptions, the natural meaning units, the themes, the focal meanings, situated structures, and the synthesized general description follow.

Subject Number One

Natural Meaning Unit #1

I often sat and reflected as to why I chose nursing as a "job". It is only at this time in my career that I am able to answer myself. In High School I worked as a nursing attendant and throughout college as well. I selected nursing not for the love of helping others but for the practicality of the profession.

Theme #1

The subject experienced the choosing of nursing as a job, not for the love of the profession but for its practicality.

Focal Meaning #1

The experience of choosing among life goals was based on the reliability of the profession rather than a committed devotion.
Natural Meaning Unit #2

This decision resulted because of the [at the time sincere and practical concern] coercion of my mother and guidance counselor.

[I think that I was directed by my mother and guidance counselor to select the career of nursing because it would be very practical. From the point of view that you could always find a job. It had a reasonable income for women. It was always a career you could fall back on regardless, perhaps, of how long you might be out of the job force—you could always get back in to it; so that you could be self sufficient somehow.

I think that my guidance counselor and my mother met individually without me and discussed the fact, and I stress the fact that it was sincere in that my mother had a tremendous concern for me as a only child, and her being an older parent, that I should always be able to support myself; and I think she wanted to have something that I would be able to enter and follow through till the end and have a career, whereas a liberal education or something very vague would not buy that stability. I think because of that, and having that in mind, together they decided that nursing would be the best avenue to pursue.

I was not a rebellious child ever. I became more rebellious when I entered college and had more social experiences which I did not have in high school, so that I
was going to please my mother and not make things difficult for her. Not that I look at it as if it was self-sacrificing but I didn't have a strong urge to do anything else, so I was not strongly opposed to it.

It was not a profession viewed as unappealing to most people. I think that from my point of view I was very anxious to work at anything—but not if they said to me I think you should be an accountant. Math is not my forte. And so I would have probably given a lot of resistance if I was pushed in that direction. So nursing, it just seemed to lend itself more to my personality. I am basically an organizer. I have a great deal of common sense and especially, having a lot of experience as a nursing attendant, it seemed to work very well with my personality. I didn't really give a lot of resistance to it.]

Theme #2

The subject's selection of nursing as a career resulted from the coercion she received from her mother and guidance counselor. Although the subject believed this coercion was sincere, she knew the decision was made by others for her; but she went along to please her mother. She offered no resistance and agreed to nursing as a profession because she didn't have a strong urge to do anything else and nursing lent itself to her abilities and personality.
Focal Meaning #2

The subject pursued a career decision made by an influential other whom she wished to please.

Natural Meaning #3

[I really entered it from the point of view that I was able to get scholarships for nursing--not for scholastic ability but for financial need--and grants, so that financially I was able to support myself through college and also work so that I could facilitate a college degree and career at the same time, whereas, had I entered into another field, I might not have had that opportunity.

In terms of being able to afford college, I didn't see nursing in terms of a broad picture of what diversity nursing could have within it. I just knew that in terms of the hours, perhaps, that you selected and the fact that, on the long term basis, you could do this for your life. That is really the way I looked at it. It was a very small picture that I had.]

Theme #3

The subject chose nursing because of the availability of scholarship assistance. She viewed nursing narrowly and did not appreciate the profession itself.

Focal Meaning #3

The subject felt comfortable as she recognized the inherent financial security in her chosen career.
Natural Meaning Unit #4

Initially, as a nurse I experienced all the stages of burnout, but continuing to work, feeling compelled to complete my destiny as a nurse. [I had a strong need to want to get out there and get working. When I finished the two year program I immediately went on and finished my BS because I felt within the profession the Associate degree was not sufficient. It was important for me to have a baccalaureate degree and I did not want to be any less than anyone else and felt that I needed to do that. I did the four-year program in three years. That had always been my incentive; I always had to do things on a time basis and I wasn't going to spend an extra year going to school to do this. I completed my BSN the following year.

I was very anxious to start. Initially, in working, the reality of the control that the hospital had over your life, in terms of your days off, the lack of flexibility really became a reality. The fact was the work was very hard. I think that I was better prepared than most students because I had been working since I was 14 as a nursing attendant. I had an idea of what was going on in the work place. But until you become a nurse and sense the responsibility, it is very different from when you're looking from the outside.]

For example, as a new graduate, I started in charge of a 40 bed medical/surgical unit and was to be appointed Assistant Nursing Care Coordinator after one year but chose
to work 8am-4pm in the Intensive Care Unit. [I felt very important, but when the reality hit me that I had to do the assignments, make sure the nursing attendants were doing their job, and the nurses were doing their job, plus I had to complete my own patients, I began to think there must be other opportunities for women than having to work this hard and not get financially rewarded.

If you were to say to someone well I'm a nurse, a certain picture comes in their mind. You are not really looked upon as an important person; the way you would be looked upon if you were to say I'm an accountant or a stockbroker. It is not the same kind of status. This bothered me a great deal because when you go out into the larger world you see that those things are important to you. Whereas, they had never been important to me before. That bothered me a great deal, the fact that you had to work very hard. The staffing was not really adequate. From the point of view of the hospital, it was adequate; this was very frustrating.

It came to the point where I really hated being a nurse for all the reasons of status, salary, limitations over my days off, the shift that I was working at the time; it was a long time before you could get a day position. It could be a two-year waiting period for a day position and that was very frustrating. I really didn't want to be a nurse but couldn't do anything else.]
Theme #4

The subject felt frustration as a new graduate. She was overwhelmed by the responsibilities and disheartened by the lack of recognition and reward, yet was unable to do anything else.

Focal Meaning #4

The subject felt angry at being trapped in her career as she struggled to live with competing values.

Natural Meaning Unit #5

I was always attracted to the challenges that I was presented with. [I was faced from the very beginning with being in a charge position. I did not have the opportunity to prove myself and then apply for a position of responsibility; it was sort of just given to me. I think it was just a random situation. You just happen to be here so you're the person in charge. I felt a tremendous need at that time to grow into that position very quickly. I think I was able to do that because I was given the opportunity to transfer to a day position in the intensive care area. My perception is that I was selected for that because I demonstrated a certain amount of ability to deliver patient care, to organize myself, and to manage the shift that I was responsible for.

I think I was able to achieve things in each area I went to. I went to coronary care unit which was very difficult for me because I went from a position of being in
charge to not knowing anything. Thinking back, I can remember my name going to the bottom of the time sheet and being upset by that. I did not like that at all. That really motivated me to strive and do well.]

Theme #5

The subject challenged herself to strive and overcome temporary setbacks.

Focal Meaning #5

The subject experienced a sense of accomplishment, the result of her personal determination and persistence.

Natural Meaning Unit #6

I had the opportunity as I was leaving there to apply for a position at the medical center as an Assistant Nursing Care Coordinator of a 7 bed ICU/CCU overflow for a 4 year period. [This position seemed to be very appealing to me. I was in charge of a 7 bed overflow unit. It was supposed to be a temporary position for about 4 months but it turned out to be four and a half years.]

I stayed with it for the four and a half years because I was able to develop the unit from what was going to be a holding area for patients to an area very well respected by the house staff and the attending staff, where they always felt that if they couldn't get their patients into the ICU or CCU they could put them in my area. I know I had a lot to do with that because of how I ran the unit. I did not have the title of a nursing care coordinator, which was at
the time a decision of the Director of Nursing, because it was a temporary area so I technically reported to the Nursing Care Coordinator in the Cardio Care Unit, which was not by her choice, but that was how the situation went. This bothered me a great deal because I was responsible for budgeting and other 24-hour responsibilities. I went to all the meetings plus I had patients. I was one of two nurses on. I had three patients and she had four or she had three and I had four depending on the acuity of the patients.

I really think that despite all the adversity the only people that wanted to work on the unit or were selected to work were new graduates. So I had an intensive care area where I had to train all the new graduates in the area. I think I did pretty well because most of the people I trained are either NCCs presently or have gone into their own private practice; they have all become very independent leadership people of one type or another. I was able to achieve a certain atmosphere in the unit in which I worked. I think I made an impression on those people. I was asked to apply for a position as a Nursing Care Coordinator.

**Theme #6**

The subject experienced staying with the responsibilities of a situation without receiving nursing service recognition and without an official title. She developed the unit into one that was well respected.
Focal Meaning #6

The subject persisted in a difficult situation and achieved a sense of accomplishment.

Natural Meaning Unit #7

And subsequent to this I became Nursing Care Coordinator on a 29-bed Medical Unit for 8 years. [There was a lot of adversity with this situation. I think I have been able to overcome most of the problems that I have come across with each situation. Some people may have said "Here comes another strike; we have to reorganize our schedule." I have tried very hard to gear myself up and to have it work out. It may not have been a positive experience for everyone, but ultimately it was. But you never know that when you go into it. But I always wanted the problems to work out, to always be optimistic when entering any kind of problem I may be having. I looked upon it as working out the schedule so that everyone would be happy, to cover the unit, to meet all the needs of the patients and the nurses. Those types of challenges were always appealing to me. It was like a puzzle.

There was a very different environment in this facility than there was in the other. There was more respect from within the profession that was given to someone in a charge position that had responsibility. There was a lot more stroking when I came here than I received at my other position and that was very important and I began to enjoy
that. I liked being recognized for being able to do something very well.]

Theme #7

The subject experienced adversity in assuming a responsible position but enjoyed the challenges and the positive stroking when overcoming various problems.

Focal Meaning #7

The subject experienced uneasiness and discomfort in the turbulent times when taking on new responsibilities of leadership, but relished the accolades of day-to-day successes.

Natural Meaning Unit #8

[And at that time just before I transferred from that division to here my mother passed away and she was very sick for a long time and I had a lot of responsibility. I had to sell her home. I had a lot of overwhelming financial problems that I had incurred because of my mother's illness. And not having any living relatives within the immediate family, I had to take on all that burden. I came here with more of the fact that they recognized that my personal experience was worth something and really regarded it as having some wisdom. I think that was the start of myself recognizing that nursing was something I enjoyed. I actually came around. I really realized then that I loved the profession. I guess I can be compared to people who have arranged marriages or are forced to marry someone and turn
around and realize that they really love the person. This
is the way I feel about nursing.]

Theme #8

The subject experienced the death of her mother along
with overwhelming personal and financial problems; this led
to the discovery of new meaning and compatibility within her
personal and professional living.

Focal Meaning #8

The subject experienced the loss of a significant other
which produced feelings of personal turmoil, leading ultimately
to positive new insights regarding her personal and
professional goals.

Natural Meaning Unit #9

Presently, I am an Assistant Director of Nursing for the
Division of Surgery [which is a whole new area for me. To
apply for a position as an Assistant Director of a surgical
unit, I think was a little bold. The fact that I was
selected certainly made me feel very good. Our interview
process is very democratic. The Associate Administrator,
Vice President of Nursing, all NCCs that are from the area
that you will be responsible for, plus the nurse educator,
interviews you. You are interviewed by them individually
but the decision is collaborative. In most cases it is a
unanimous decision among them. I think that gave me a
tremendous amount of confidence when I started the position.
It was intimidating to have become familiar with the surgical
procedures and actually look at the OR schedule. As a medical
nurse I rarely ever looked at it. So for the first time I had
many sleepless nights when I started the job.]

Theme #9

The subject experienced feelings of boldness and
intimidation when applying for a position for which she did
not have direct experience, but gained a sense of confidence
when she was selected for the position and began to grow
into it.

Focal Meaning #9

The subject felt both apprehensive and self-assured as
she embarked upon a new professional role.

Natural Meaning Unit #10

It was not until recently when applying for this most
recent position that I realized that it is because of my
love of nursing that I have remained in this profession and
not just for the challenges faced. This does not relate to
my selecting or making a choice towards achievement of my
goals.

It first occurred to me how much I missed nursing
management during my maternity leave of absence with my son.
[I couldn't imagine that anybody managing would miss their
management position. I did miss nursing because I was away
from it. I missed the nursing piece, either seeing the sick
patient do well and go home or see them not do well and go
home.
I missed making decisions and having authority. Power is something and a term you shouldn't use loosely. I didn't consider it real power maybe because I really didn't think I had power when I did. It was certainly a heavy responsibility, having the responsibility to make decisions, very important decisions. Choosing what your son is going to eat is an important decision for a mother. But it wasn't the same as making decisions for a lot of people, and something that will be noticed by a lot of people.]

It was over a six-month period of time that I realized my need to work with nurses and patients. [I really for myself needed that feedback, whether I made a good decision or a bad decision. I still needed that feedback. Staying home with my son was very rewarding. But I still needed that piece and I needed to be independent from a personal point of view.

I have always been very independent. It was very hard for me to ask for money from my husband. Certainly my husband was not a tyrant in any way. But I never have been in a position to depend on anyone. I know I married my husband because I love him and not because I needed him to support me. It is very important to me that I continue to work. That is why I missed the management piece. I am a nurse so I missed the nursing piece as well.]
Theme #10

The subject missed being away from her nursing management position while on maternity leave with her son. It was a time when she realized why she loved nursing and how much she wanted the power, responsibility and authority granted by her management role. She desired to have again the feeling of independence gained from working.

Focal Meaning #10

As a new mother, the subject experienced an uncomfortable longing as she remembered the satisfaction and fulfillment of times when being a leader of others was paramount.

Natural Meaning Unit #11

I feel comfortable rather than confused with my decision to select nursing. When the opportunity presented itself for me to apply for this new opportunity, I was also feeling the need to have another child. Choosing having another child vs. career advancement has been very tortuous as they are both very important goals to me, which at this time in my life/career were difficult to determine.

[I think that having the distance from the job really helped; I had the opportunity first of all to meet people who were not working, who had selected to stay home. One friend I came across happened to have been a buyer for Altman's who selected to stay home because she really had no sense of reward at the job. She made choices in taking the blue dress over the black dress. So it made me think am I doing]
anything that really impacts on anybody's life, something that is of importance? I needed to hear these kinds of things because there are many things that we do as nurses that have tremendous impact on people's life. I think the public is starting to realize that. I realized that as a nurse. It became very important to me that I wanted to start supporting nurses themselves and make them feel better about themselves. I would also like the public to feel better about nurses and for nurses' image to be better. I felt that by staying home and avoiding the opportunity to go back to work it was not giving my profession any benefit either. I went back for all the other reasons but felt that was the piece that was important. I still feel very strongly about it. Maybe if you ask me in six months I may feel differently again. My son is getting older and he needs me more than he did when he was an infant. Now it is more difficult for me to go to work. Initially, it wasn't difficult for me to go to work. Now I feel more torn. So we will have to see what happens.

Theme #11

The subject experienced being torn between parenthood and career advancement, although absence from her job provided insight and resolution to return to work. She recognized the impact and importance that the nursing profession has and opted for work without knowing the full consequences of her choice.
Focal Meaning #11

The subject experienced struggling with conflicting values as she carefully chose beyond the immediate moment to fulfill new possibilities without full knowledge of the outcomes.

Natural Meaning Unit #12

[Somehow I feel I had a tremendous burden to prove that as a woman and a nurse it was possible to go back into the work force and be able to achieve certain things. It is very difficult, not something everyone can do but it depends on how motivated you are. I should also stress that I came for financial reasons as well. That was a very important motivating factor that I came back to work, but it was not the only thing. My husband felt that we will only have one car and we won't have steak five times a week. There are certain things we will cut back on if you really want to stay home. I really didn't. I think as nurses, no matter how much education, and I'm sure they will be upset with this, nurses are really masters of organization and priority setting and, no matter what you do, that carries into your personal life.

Probably if you look at a nurse and the way they are able to organize their day, you would see this. I saw this term in an article, that women are guardians of relationships and of life and of their children, and that is true. That is maybe why women make such good nurses. I think that my
experience as a nurse passed over into my personal life so that I am able to prioritize when it comes to my family life. The house doesn't need to be dusted today or it is more important that I spend time with my son or husband.]

Theme #12

The subject experienced a tremendous burden to prove that women nurses could achieve success in the work force, depending on their degree of self-motivation; this was coupled with the belief that nurses' ability to organize, set priorities, and care for others carries over to their personal life.

Focal Meaning #12

The subject exerted a self-imposed pressure to synchronize life events in a way that promotes multiple achievements.

Natural Meaning Unit #13

[I think it really gives me a better perspective, as well as the fact that you see the patient suffering and ill, and you realize that life is very important and it is important to make choices that set priorities. I think many people are very confused and never come to terms or come to the point of making a choice. I think a lot of women stay home because they're confused and cannot come to a decision.]

Theme #13

The subject experienced a new understanding of living from her nursing practice and realized the importance of
making a choice. Personal decision-making is difficult and may cause confusion, and confusion impedes decision-making.

**Focal Meaning #13**

The subject experienced a changed perspective as she lived multiple roles which led to new significance in her life.

**Natural Meaning Unit #14**

[When making a decision, I think I really make a better decision when I have time to think about them. I really try to go with my gut feeling about things and see whether I'm comfortable with that, whether or not I can live with the decision. I look at the practical point of view. Then I look at it according to my gut feeling and that is how I make decisions.]

**Theme #14**

The subject experienced making the best decision when there was time to think it through, and then decided with her gut feeling.

**Focal Meaning #14**

The subject experienced choosing by selecting among alternatives with some contemplation but primarily through intuition.

**Natural Meaning Unit #15**

My son was 4 years old at the time I received a great deal of pressure from friends, strangers and acquaintances, and especially from my obstetrician, that it was time and in fact
getting a little late to have another child. First my age (I'm approaching 35—where did the time go?) and entering high risk, but I also might not be faced with another opportunity within my preconceived time frame for reaching my career goals. I thought and thought, spent sleepless nights trying to decide.

[It was very difficult. It was something I wavered over a very long time. I received a lot of pressure from my obstetrician. Pressure from other people that I dealt with, not only just professionally but socially as well. Why was I waiting so long to have another child—is that what I wanted? Even though I don't have a close family, I have enough good friends who were asking the question. It had me wondering, am I doing the right thing or am I not doing the right thing? It was very confusing.

It was a very complex decision. First of all I was confused about whether I was making the right decision in separating the ages of my children. I was being given the opportunity for advancement that I may not be presented again with in such a timely fashion. This was a very important career opportunity for me that I did not want to let pass by. I wanted it to be here. I didn't want to be at another facility. Which was going to be more important to me? Could I ignore what other people were saying? It was not terrible having your children far apart if that is what you want to do. But am I doing the right thing by the
book by separating my children so far apart? Am I being an indiscriminate mother by putting myself before my family decision?

I'm getting older; I will be 35 this year. I did have health problems when I was pregnant the last time. So with me being older it is not good either. Being older it has its own problems. Is it really the wisest decision? But the opportunity lent itself and I really wanted to take advantage of that, so putting off having another child for the opportunity to get promoted to an Assistant Director of Nursing was really more important to me at the time, and in terms of my long term goals it was necessary to complete that piece.

I was looking for, well, 35 years down the road. I don't know. But I certainly wanted to complete my Masters degree. To finalize a time to go back and get my Masters which I thought about for many years. Because I did make an attempt when I first graduated and started work to go back to school but I was very disillusioned. I was very idealistic and began to feel, and I still feel, that education and service are just so far apart. So I had a very hard time.]

Theme #15

The subject experienced personal, social and medical pressure to consider a second pregnancy which caused her much confusion and turmoil. The choice between pregnancy and
accepting a promotion was difficult, complex, and filled with social and cultural implications.

**Focal Meaning #15**

The subject experienced intense discomfort in having to make choices when confronted with conflicting values.

**Natural Meaning Unit #16**

[I think that if I would have gone into another field I would have pushed myself just as much as I have in nursing. It's a personality thing. Being an only child, both my parents not living, it was very important to me to have a sense of myself and the ability to achieve things as an independent person. I can't really rely on people around me to achieve things for me or be a part of their achievement. I don't have that kind of support so I think it is very important to achieve it for myself and, of course, for my family.

I wouldn't want my son to grow up and say that I went to work and stayed in the same position and never looked to achieve or improve myself. I want him to see that while I tried to improve myself and advance in my career it had some weight along with it. I think that may be important for him to see. Who knows in 20 years he might turn around and say "You abandoned me and went to work and left me in the care of someone else." I will have to deal with it at that time. I know there are some women who have not had the opportunity for education but had to work because they were desperate
and had to earn a salary for their family. I don't know what they would use as a measure to try to offset their reason for working.]

**Theme #16**

The subject realized the importance of pushing and striving for personal and family success as an independent person but recognized there may be a price to pay for leaving her son and achieving career success.

**Focal Meaning #16**

The subject relied on her own determination to achieve while acknowledging the potential of personal risks.

**Natural Meaning Unit #17**

You probably are thinking "Do it both; take the job and get pregnant", but I could not ethically do this. To incur this much stress was not wise. I would also be expected (and I was finally ready) to start graduate school. Therefore, my decision was to take the promotion when it was offered, because this goal had always been very important to me. [It was also important for me to move on. I couldn't stay in the same position I was in. I was really independent. I rarely went to my supervisor who was the Assistant Director of Nursing. I felt the need to have a different perspective on hospital administration and nursing administration.] I always craved the responsibility, prestige and reward that the position has afforded me. Hopefully, if everything was meant to be, it will all fall in place. My
husband just lost his job. He was a casualty of the Wall Street crash. It is unfortunate but helped cement my feeling about my decision to hold off on having another baby.

[My mother raised me very much to be independent. "Make sure you are able to rely on yourself." I think somewhat from a bitter point of view that you can't really rely on anyone else. I think I was perceptive enough to realize there was a bitterness in her voice when she said that. It was very important for me to be independent. The fact that my husband lost his job really cemented that fact.

I make a worthwhile salary and really contribute to the family. That really makes a difference. This is not the first time. After I had my son about four months and I went back to work, my husband lost his job. He didn't work for about eight months. That was difficult. It was a different kind of loss. This loss was completely out of his control. The other loss, even though he didn't have a lot to do with it—he felt very devastated by it. It was very important for me to be working for distraction, for myself, because I was trying to be supportive of him.]

Theme #17

The subject experienced the need for increased prestige, responsibility, and reward and therefore accepted a promotion. Although working with a young child, postponing a second pregnancy, and experiencing the loss of her husband's job
created emotional stress, the subject realized she had made the right decision.

**Focal Meaning #17**

The subject considered her personal values and goals with unsettled emotions yet made the selection trusting her intuition.

**Natural Meaning Unit #18**

[Going back to work initially with a child was difficult. It reinforced the feelings I had previously that it was important for me to work. You never know in this day and age when you or your husband might not have a job.]

On the other hand, each day I take my son to day care for his too-long day he asks, "Please Mommy, I just want to stay home with you." And, "I want at least two more brothers. Can't you and Daddy make one for me?" I feel guilty. [I feel very badly. Now that he is older, he needs me more and it is much more difficult to go to work. I feel guilty. It seems like you can never win. You want to stay home but you can't. I feel guilty because I like to go to work. But I still feel badly that he really doesn't understand why I have to work. I tell him Mommy really likes to go to work and Mommy's going to work enables us to go on vacations and do other things and will help send you to school. It is important for me to go to work. I try to say that to him now. He may not understand it. He may not remember it. I
don't know. But it kind of helps me feel better about feeling guilty.]

**Theme #18**

The subject experienced guilt when leaving her son to go to work, knowing he did not understand her desire to work.

**Focal Meaning #18**

The subject experienced conflicting feelings when separating daily from a loved child to pursue a chosen goal.

**Natural Meaning Unit #19**

No one said it would be simple but at least I feel comfortable. [I've always worked. I enjoy working. It gives me a lot of satisfaction. It just seems to fit right into my life. It is not an intrusion in terms of my family life. Even though I think I work my life around my job rather than my job around my family life. I don't have the flexibilities of hours and days of the week to do it that way. So I really do my family in around my job. I feel very comfortable with it. My son is being taken care of. He is socializing with other children. He would not be socializing with them if I would be staying home, since there are few children on the block that I live on. At school he is more stimulated. I would not have the patience to do the arts and crafts that he has the opportunity to do at school.

I like to work. I don't feel badly. I don't try to deny that feeling. All in all I feel comfortable with the
decision to work. It does become difficult. It has been 5 years that I have been working with a child. It does get more difficult as the child gets older. I'm sure having a second child would be even more complicated. Having two children is a whole different ball game. Having one child is not two children. So that may present a different perspective. I have every intention of working. It is just a matter of working out every detail of the child care. Soon as I feel comfortable that my children will be well taken care of I have no problem of returning to work.]

Thanks for the opportunity to talk about this experience, which is probably not unique.

Theme #19

The subject experienced comfort and satisfaction at working while recognizing it was difficult being a working parent.

Focal Meaning #19

The subject experienced personal pride and fulfillment in living a selected goal while simultaneously experiencing conflict with other life goals.

Subject Number One--Situated Structural Description

For this subject the experience of choosing among life goals emerges in the context of her experience in selecting nursing as a profession. Her decision was based on the reliability of the profession rather than a committed devotion to it. She pursued this career decision because it
had been made by an influential other whom she wished to please. She felt comfortable as she recognized the inherent financial security in her chosen career. The subject felt angry at being trapped by the overwhelming responsibilities of the profession as she struggled to live with the conflicting values of being a new graduate. She experienced a sense of accomplishment, the result of her personal determination and persistence in new and different situations.

She persisted even though working as a new nurse manager was difficult and again felt a sense of accomplishment in this challenging situation. In taking on the new responsibilities of leadership, the subject experienced uneasiness and discomfort, yet she relished the accolades of day-to-day successes. During this time, the subject experienced the loss of a significant other which produced feelings of personal turmoil, leading ultimately to positive new insights regarding her personal and professional goals. She felt both apprehensive and self-assured as she embarked upon a new professional role as an Assistant Director of Nursing.

While on maternity leave, the subject experienced an uncomfortable longing for her management position, remembering the satisfaction and fulfillment of times when being being a leader of others was paramount. She struggled with the conflicting values of parenthood and career advancement as once again she chose beyond the immediate moment to fulfill
new possibilities without full knowledge of the outcomes. The subject exerted a self-imposed pressure to achieve professional success, while synchronizing her life events in a way that would promote multiple achievements. She experienced a changed perspective as she lived multiple roles which led to new significance in her life. She selected among alternatives with some contemplation but primarily through intuition.

She experienced intense discomfort when forced to choose between the conflicting values of a second pregnancy and a career promotion. But she continued to approach life with a self-sustaining determination to achieve while, at the same time, acknowledging the potential of personal risks placed upon herself and family. She considered her personal values and goals with unsettled emotions yet made the selection, trusting her intuition.

The subject experienced conflicting feelings when separating daily from her child to go to work. But she felt a sense of personal pride and fulfillment as she lived her goal of full-time work, although simultaneously experiencing conflict with other life goals.
Subject Number Two

Natural Meaning Unit #1

The choice between career and motherhood is a situation I am experiencing now. Most people would think that combining nursing and being a mother would be easy--I did. [I felt that since nursing is a twenty-four hour profession, meaning nurses are needed around the clock, that combining nursing with being a mother would not be difficult. I could choose my hours to practice my profession, and the rest of the time I could be home with my child.] However, now that I am actually experiencing having to choose, I am finding it one of the most difficult decisions I have had to make. [Once I became aware of the life inside of me [i.e., feeling fetal movement] there developed a symbiotic relationship between myself and my baby. I found myself thinking less of my job and more of my relationship with my child. Therefore, I found myself torn between wanting to be with my child all the time and leaving my child to go to work. This experience made the decision to return or not to return to work difficult for me.]

Theme #1

The subject experienced difficulty in having to choose between her career and motherhood. She thought it would be easy to combine her nursing career with parental responsibilities. However, once she became aware of the
life inside of her she felt torn between wanting to be with her baby all the time and leaving to go to work.

**Focal Meaning #1**

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around the feeling of being pulled in opposite directions by motherhood and her chosen career.

**Natural Meaning Unit #2**

I worked very hard to get where I am professionally. After attending a diploma nursing school, it took me five years to receive my BSN. I am now working on my Master's degree. I have been a nurse for ten years, and have slowly worked my way up to my present position. I love my job, and the chance to move up in nursing administration in my institution is very good. The only problem is that I am presently entering my eighth month of pregnancy. [I never believed that I would view pregnancy as a problem but I know that my chances for future promotions will probably be delayed. By taking a maternity leave, I am not guaranteed my job when I return.]

**Theme #2**

The subject worked hard at achieving professional success through education and persistence. However, her pregnancy might jeopardize her professional stability and progress.
Focal Meaning #2

Through diligence and perseverance, the subject realized professional fulfillment, but the continuation of her professional accomplishments depended upon the outcome of her pregnancy.

Natural Meaning Unit #3

Before I became pregnant I thought it would be simple to be supermom, maintain my career, have a family, finish school, etc. Now that I am pregnant, I realize how wrong I was. [For me, it will be impossible to be both a dedicated mother as well as a dedicated professional. Somewhere something has to give. I can't do my job the way I'm used to if I'm worrying about my child, and vice versa.]

Theme #3

Prior to becoming pregnant, the subject believed she could balance her personal and professional obligations. But now that she was pregnant, she realized the impossibility of being committed to both simultaneously. For her, choosing was an either/or situation.

Focal Meaning #3

The subject experienced a changed perspective when confronted with the reality of blending family and career commitments.
Natural Meaning Unit #4

Leaving an infant in child care scares me, as well as makes me feel guilty. [I felt uneasy about the thought of leaving my child in day care or with a baby-sitter. These feelings were due to the stories of sexual and child abuse I have heard in the media.] I would have a lot of guilt also if I could not or was not doing my job up to the standards I have set for myself. [I felt guilty because I honestly believe that a child should be with his/her mother or father as an infant. A day care provider cannot nurture or care for a baby as well as the parents can. Therefore if I returned to work I would be satisfying my own needs by sacrificing the needs of my baby. I have great responsibilities in my job that need total dedication. If I was worried about what was happening with my baby while I was at work, I would not be able to do my job with the dedication it needs, due to being distracted.]

Working part-time in administration is not an option, because where I work they do not believe in part-time management. I will have to choose between keeping my job and sacrificing being with my child, or being with my baby and losing my job in administration and going back to staff nursing where time planning is more flexible. Under the circumstances, the choice is relatively clear. I will sacrifice my present position to be with my child. I chose to become pregnant and I want to be a mother. [Leaving my
job as an Evening Assistant Director of Nursing is a significant sacrifice for me. This position is something I have worked very hard at for a period of ten years. Giving up this position with all its power and responsibility is not easy. There is only a small chance that I will ever have the opportunity to serve in this position again.

**Theme #4**

The subject felt fear and uneasiness about child care services. She believed that it was her parental responsibility to care for her child and thought it selfish to return to work. She also knew she could no longer be totally dedicated to her work as she would be distracted by thoughts about her baby.

**Focal Meaning #4**

Fraught with misgivings about delegating parental duties, the subject suppressed her professional self interests.

**Natural Meaning Unit #5**

I am professionally dedicated, but not enough that it takes precedence over being with my family. I feel frustrated that I cannot do both, but I do realize my limitations both personally and professionally. [When I realized that I personally could not be "super mom," doing my job as well as raising my child, I felt upset with myself. I really thought I could manage both but when I realized that both my job and my baby would need my full dedication, I had to give up one or the other. I feel unhappy with this outcome but
my personal goals come first and having this baby was a personal goal.

Theme #5

The subject experienced frustration in not being able to accomplish her personal and professional goals simultaneously. Once she recognized her limitations, she felt upset with her inability to manage both goals because of the amount of dedication required. She chose the personal over the professional.

Focal Meaning #5

The subject experienced anxiety because of her inability to pursue two aspirations concurrently but, acknowledging her commitment to perfection, she opted for personal fulfillment with a family.

Natural Meaning Unit #6

I also feel frustrated that in my institution they really believe that motherhood and being a professional nurse at the administrative level do not mix, and, therefore, no effort is ever made to accommodate both. [There have been many proposals offered to nursing administration with regard to flex time {10-12 hour shifts} for nurse managers. It is upsetting and frustrating to have to give up what one has worked hard for {i.e. my job} because nursing administration is dead set against flex time for nurse managers. It leaves one with a feeling of being lost because, before you have your baby, you're needed, and, after
the birth, unless one comes back on the terms of the nursing administration, you are no longer needed.] A lot of good nurse managers and leaders are lost because of this inflexible attitude.

**Theme #6**

The subject experienced frustration because of her employer's lack of accommodation to nurse managers who are mothers. She believed the inflexibility of the nursing administration in scheduling caused hard feelings and the loss of good nurse managers.

**Focal Meaning #6**

The subject experienced feelings of anger and uneasiness with rigid employment policy.

**Natural Meaning Unit #7**

Maybe one day things will change, but for the present time, I must face the reality of the situation. [By facing the reality of the situation, I mean just that. I have seen many excellent nurse managers leave their positions for the same reasons as I. This is truly a fact, not just fiction. Administration wants nurse managers to work five days per week, eight hours per day, and unless one does that there is no room in administration for you.]

**Theme #7**

The subject hoped that some day the situation confronting nurse managers' schedules would change. Without greater
flexibility, excellent nurse managers would resign their positions to accommodate personal needs.

Focal Meaning #7

The subject aspired to different possibilities for herself and others as she struggled with conflicting demands.

Natural Meaning Unit #8

The choice for me is clear: work or family. This is very disheartening. [I feel disheartened by the situation because, as much as I love being home with the baby and realize the importance of being home, I feel that I am giving up part of myself in leaving my job. If nursing administration was a little more flexible, a combination of motherhood and nursing management might be possible.]

Theme #8

In choosing family over work, the subject was disheartened. She felt forced into giving up a part of her professional identity because of rigid job requirements and considered what might be possible if nursing administration were more flexible.

Focal Meaning #8

In the process of selecting one chosen ideal for another, the subject was dispirited, being bound by feelings of loss from pressures imposed by others.
Natural Meaning Unit #9

While I know that I do not regret the decision I made, it's hard to give up what I worked so hard to obtain professionally. [I feel that I have made the right decision in staying home with my baby and forfeiting my position; therefore I do not regret what I have done. I feel that being with my child is more important than my professional standing. It is difficult to give up my position when I honestly believe that a compromise between myself and the institution could be arranged that would have benefited us both, if nursing administration would try to be a little flexible.]

Theme #9

The subject believed she did not regret her decision to forfeit her professional position to stay home with her baby. However, it was difficult to give up this position when she honestly believed that a compromise could have been arranged that benefited her employer as well as herself.

Focal Meaning #9

Feeling she had made the right decision in choosing a cherished family option rather than professional tenure, the subject experienced frustration about losing her professional stature, knowing other alternatives were possible.

Subject Number Two--Situated Structural Description

For Subject Number Two, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around the feeling of being pulled
in opposite directions by motherhood and her nursing career. Through diligence and perseverance, the subject realized professional fulfillment, but the continuation of future professional accomplishments depended upon the outcome of her pregnancy. She experienced a changed perspective when confronted with the reality of blending family and career commitments.

Fraught with misgivings about delegating parental duties, she suppressed her professional self-interests. Although disillusioned by her inability to pursue two aspirations at the same time, she acknowledged her commitment to perfection and opted for personal fulfillment with a family. The subject was also angry and uneasy about the rigid policy of her employer. She aspired to different possibilities for herself and others as she struggled with the conflicting demands of her personal and managerial time. In the process of selecting one chosen ideal over another, the subject was dispirited and experienced feelings of loss, the result of pressures imposed by others to give up a cherished activity. Feeling she had made the right decision in choosing a family option rather than professional tenure, the subject still felt frustration about losing her professional stature, knowing other alternatives were possible.
Subject Number Three

Natural Meaning Unit #1

The birth of my son five months ago has forced me to choose life goals in a way nothing before has done. [Prior to my son's birth, any decision I made about what I was doing, where I was going, involved me [an independent adult] and, relatively recently, my husband [another independent adult]. Now my decisions need to include another individual who is totally dependent upon us for survival, someone of whom I am fiercely protective and for whom I want to provide the right environment in which to develop. No longer do I have the ability to say, "Let's go to...for a few days." Now I have to consider if they take children; do they have the facilities for feeding and sleeping; and will it be worth it.]

[So, too, it is with long term decisions [working and moving]. We have to consider the needs of our son and of us as a family, as we make these decisions. Marriage and the multiple adjustments that result from it has had nowhere the impact of my son's arrival.]

Theme #1

Following the birth of her son, the subject was forced to choose life goals in new ways. The impact of the birth of this child affected all her life decisions and required that she make multiple adjustments.
Focal Meaning #1

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around the unforeseen imbalance and repercussions of a new offspring on all life events.

Natural Meaning Unit #2

In the time before my son's birth, I would describe myself in terms of my occupation and work as a nurse manager. [My career was an extremely important goal, perhaps one of my foremost concerns. It was all I cared about. Nothing meant so much. I would set short and long-term career goals with a timetable to match each goal listed. My most valued goal was to attain a high level administrative position in nursing.]

I enjoyed my job as a middle manager and felt I was moving towards my goal. Work was a large part of my life; I was good at what I did. And I felt positive about the kinds of contributions I was making to the organization and the nursing profession.]

Theme #2

Prior to the birth of her son, the subject viewed herself as a professional person committed to her career. She obtained much personal satisfaction and self-esteem from her work as a nurse administrator. Enjoying work and pursuing challenges, she aspired to a promotion to a higher executive-level position in nursing as a primary goal.
Focal Meaning #2

The subject's self-image prior to childbearing included career aspirations, professional commitments and positive self-regard.

Natural Meaning Unit #3

One thousand diapers later, I find myself wanting to spend more time with my child, wanting to watch him grow and discover the world around him. [I want to be there and observe how he learns about the world he lives in. I want to experience for myself the joy of watching him take the first step, speak the first word and playing with and laughing at each other, rather than have those moments experienced by a baby-sitter.] Suddenly, parenting has become my most valued goal.

Theme #3

While caring for and observing her child interact with the world around him, the subject wanted only to be with her child rather than pursue her career goals.

Focal Meaning #3

After experiencing special moments of parental joy, the subject suppressed professional ambitions in favor of family goals.

Natural Meaning Unit #4

However, the reality of the situation is that, while parenting is very important to me, I must work. I am forced
to choose between the full-time employment that is required for career advancement and the part-time work that will enable us to continue to have a roof over our heads and still allow me to spend more time with my son. [I investigated a number of child care options before making my decision. We have neither the space nor the inclination for live-in help. Day care in the home was my preference. I found my son would be one of five or six youngsters of varying ages being taken care of in someone else's home. As I considered all that was involved in his care and multiplied that by six I came out with too few hours for my son while he was as young as he was. The company of other children was not yet as important as the consistent presence of a loving care giver. In-laws were not an option for us so we decided to try the option of my working part-time. Actually, I decided. My husband was willing to try the day care options; I found I did not want to.]

**Theme #4**

The subject was forced to choose between full-time employment to achieve a managerial promotion and part-time employment to achieve financial stability while having more family time. She opted for part-time work so as to provide the consistent presence of a loving care giver.

**Focal Meaning #4**

The subject experienced self-imposed pressure to choose
between profession and family as she selected one professional option.

Natural Meaning Unit #5

I question whether the decision to go part-time is a wise one, yet it is a decision I make for me, now. [At the time I returned to work part-time, my husband began a new position. So however much I wanted to stay home with my son, I did have to work a little to help make ends meet. It was during the time I was working part-time that I started to feel sorry that I had left the full-time arena. I began to wonder, had I still been employed, whether or not I would have been promoted. In addition, I began to become envious of my husband's new job, with its intrigues, challenges, and prestige. Hearing my husband's stories of meeting new people, assessing systems and staff, and decision-making, reminded me of all I had left in my job. I indeed believe envy describes what I felt. My husband was doing all that I gave up to spend more time with my son.] I and only I have to live with the decision of part-time employment and learn to let go of "the wonderings of what life would be like if I continued to work full-time."

Theme #5

Although the subject decided upon part-time employment, she realized her ambivalence in light of the envious feelings she had when hearing about her husband's daily work intrigues and challenges.
Focal Meaning #5

Struggling to live with a selected option, the subject experienced self-doubt and envy when confronted with her significant other's professional fulfillment and success.

Natural Meaning Unit #6

With the freedom of only working part-time, I am able to treasure the small intimacies that are a part of spending the day with my son. [The smiles you get out of the blue when something he sees delights him...the hugs when he's still sleepy and cuddly...the joy of introducing new sights, sounds, smells to him and watching the wonder of his response.] The moments when you can study the utter absorption he devotes to a task and the struggles he achieves over another "first"--a smile, rolling over, sitting up--the luxury of "doing nothing together." It is truly delightful to have the opportunity to spend these precious moments together because I know that it only happens once. And yet, despite observing all these first events, I feel a bit guilty about leaving the professional person within me unattended.

Theme #6

With the freedom and flexibility of part-time employment, the subject experienced time well spent with her child. She delighted in his daily accomplishments and knew that these treasured moments would not last forever. Despite sharing
in these times, she felt guilty about leaving her professional identity unattended.

Focal Meaning #6

The subject experienced the conflicting feelings of the joy of parenting and the guilt of ignoring her potential as a professional being.

Natural Meaning Unit #7

I rebel against the need to make the choice between motherhood and full-time work. Perhaps I should have had children earlier; perhaps I should have been born in another time or place, a time when women had no choices. [I want to have it all! Always have. I wanted the peace and privacy of my own home when I had a Manhattan apartment. I wanted the excitement and convenience of a Manhattan apartment when I got my Stamford home. So, too, with this--work was never as good when I was in it as it was when I left. However, deep down, I'm happy with my choice of being a parent. For now, I do not live in another time or place, and I do not regret the decision to have my son. He has brought a magic to me I never imagined possible.] We tried and waited a long time to have my son. I think finally having a child, when you are forced to consider that you may never have one, makes that child "super special", if that's at all possible.] This is where I want to be now in my life.
Theme #7

The subject rebelled against having to make a choice between having a child and giving up her full-time job. She wanted to have it all—parenthood and a full-time career. However, the happiness brought by the long-awaited child compensated for any regrets about giving up a full-time career for parenthood.

Focal Meaning #7

The subject experienced discontent over having to choose between goals she believed could be lived simultaneously.

Natural Meaning Unit #8

As my son grows, I shall be re-examining my situation and once again making choices. I see my decision about part-time work as one for the time while my son is still young. As he grows older and begins to need and benefit from playing with other children, I think day care will be an option I will be more comfortable with. At that time, I plan to resume full-time work and pursue those professional goals I once had hoped for. Perhaps you shall hear from me again!

Theme #8

The subject planned to explore her life choices as her child grew and to consider resuming full-time work at that time. For the present, she was content working part-time while her child was still young and postponing her professional goals.
Focal Meaning #8

The subject pondered her life goals and contemplated different options in light of unfolding family obligations and commitments.

Subject Number Three--Situated Structural Description

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around the unforeseen imbalance and repercussions caused by a new offspring on all aspects of her life. The subject's self-image prior to childbearing included career aspirations, professional commitments and positive self-regard. After experiencing special moments of parental joy, the subject suppressed her professional ambitions in favor of family goals. She experienced self-imposed pressure to choose between profession and family, opting for the latter as she selected part-time employment. Struggling to live with the selected option, the subject experienced self-doubt and envy when confronted with her significant other's professional fulfillment and success. She experienced the conflicting feelings of the joy of parenting and of the guilt of ignoring her potential as a professional being. She experienced discontent over having to choose between goals she believed could be lived simultaneously. The subject pondered her life goals and contemplated different options in light of unfolding family obligations and commitments.
Subject Number Four

Natural Meaning Unit #1

There are many goals in life that I have worked towards. Some have been met, others I am continuing to strive to achieve. Throughout the years, I have worked towards the goals of having a baby and owning my own home. [These are probably the most important that I can remember. Neither one of these goals came easy, and there were many times when I thought I wouldn't have either of them. I felt the harder I worked towards accomplishing my goals the further I seemed to be from reaching them. Life was not easy for me at this time. I often felt frustrated and lost.]

Theme #1

The subject had many goals. The two most important and most frustrating to achieve were having a baby and owning a home.

Focal Meaning #1

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around struggling to achieve a child and a material possession.

Natural Meaning Unit #2

In trying to have a baby I went to two different infertility specialists, each of which put me through many tests and procedures, most of which I found were physically uncomfortable. [I became more frustrated after the results of these tests. I wanted to have a baby very much but I was
not having much success. I felt like an hourglass with the sand running out rather quickly.] Then, finally, there were two choices that I had for hope which my physician gave me: surgery or apply to an in vitro fertilization program. My choice was to undergo surgery because it was less costly and seemed most appropriate at the moment. I went through surgery with high hopes.

**Theme #2**

The subject experienced difficulty in attempting to become pregnant. She chose surgery rather than in vitro fertilization.

**Focal Meaning #2**

The subject experienced adversity as she strove to conceive, was confronted with options, and made a choice.

**Natural Meaning Unit #3**

After a year and a half post surgery, and attempting to become pregnant without success, we decided to apply to the in vitro fertilization program. [It was during this year and a half that I remember praying and crying. I became angry and frustrated at myself for my inability to become pregnant. My husband was very supportive. He knew how important it was to me. I had a lot of mixed feelings. There were many times I felt very disappointed and just wanted to give up trying. However, there were other times I wondered if I had done enough--did I pursue every reasonable avenue?]
Theme #3

After attempting and failing to conceive a year and a half post surgery, the subject decided to apply for the in vitro fertilization program. She was filled with anger, frustration, disappointment and self-doubt over her inability to bear a child.

Focal Meaning #3

The subject experienced a sense of self-doubt, personal failure and turmoil as she struggled to conceive a child.

Natural Meaning #4

After waiting about two years and not hearing from the in vitro program, we decided to begin to look for a new home. Since I was feeling unsuccessful at my first goal, I wanted to get on with my life. It was during this house-hunting process that I began to also experience some frustration, anger and disappointment. But now these feelings were different from my inability to become pregnant because I knew I would eventually find the home I was looking for. [In looking for my dream house, I was very angry and frustrated at the estate agent. Despite the fact that we clearly explained what we wanted, we were not at all satisfied with the houses or areas we were being shown. No one seemed to understand our desires and goals.]

Theme #4

While awaiting news from the in vitro program, the subject proceeded to plan for another goal, buying a home.
She once again experienced feelings of frustration, anger and disappointment at not attaining a desired outcome but knew that eventually she would.

**Focal Meaning #4**

While anticipating the successful achievement of one planned goal, the subject worked toward achieving another goal but experienced disillusionment again in its pursuit, acknowledging it would only be temporary.

**Natural Meaning #5**

During the time that we were eagerly looking for a new home, I was suddenly faced with the decision that we could not afford to buy a new home and participate in the *in vitro* fertilization program. The difficulty was that we wanted both very much but we would have to set some personal priorities. [The problem was that having a child should have a higher priority than buying a home. However, I also knew that there was a certain risk of failure in the fertility program. I was confronted with choosing between a baby or a house. I had to decide upon obtaining the dream house or waiting to hear from the *in vitro* program, since I was on the waiting list. I spent many sleepless nights tossing and turning at the thought of having to choose between the two most important things I wanted out of my life. It just did not seem fair to have to choose: baby or home. They were not equal in stature.] We finally decided on buying a home. Should they have called us from the
program, we would have to work something out. This was not an easy decision to make. I felt very guilty at the time, but believed that things would eventually work for the best.

Theme #5

The subject was confronted with having to choose between two important life goals: a home, or a baby. Financial limitations forced her to set priorities. Choosing between these important life goals was difficult and left her feeling guilty.

Focal Meaning #5

The subject struggled with her dilemma, selected one cherished option, and felt guilty.

Natural Meaning Unit #6

One month prior to moving into our new home, I found out that I was two months pregnant. Three months later, the in vitro program called to say I was accepted. They had tried to reach me several months ago at work but were told that I was at a meeting. I never received the message that they had called.

Theme #6

Prior to moving into her new home, the subject discovered her pregnancy and learned of her acceptance into the in vitro program.
Focal Meaning #6

While planning to fulfill a chosen life goal, the subject learned that another chosen life goal would also be attained.

Natural Meaning Unit #7

I am glad I made my decision to buy the house when I did since I was able to achieve both goals. I never thought it would be possible for it to happen the way it did but I am grateful and delighted to have a new baby and a new home for that baby.

Theme #7

The subject was glad she decided to buy the house; although postponing the in vitro program, she had become pregnant on her own and ultimately achieved both goals.

Focal Meaning #7

The subject experienced pleasure in accomplishing her two most important life goals.

Subject Number Four--Situated Structural Description

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around struggling to achieve a child and a material possession. She experienced adversity as she strove to conceive, was confronted with options and made a choice. She also felt a sense of self-doubt, personal failure and turmoil in this struggle. While anticipating the successful achievement of one planned goal, having a
baby, the subject worked toward achieving another goal, buying a house. Once again, she experienced disillusionment in the pursuit of this goal, but acknowledged it would only be temporary. Struggling with her dilemma, the subject selected one cherished option and felt guilty. While fulfilling this goal, the subject learned that her other chosen life goal would occur. She experienced pleasure in this accomplishment of her two most important life goals.
Subject Number Five

Natural Meaning Unit #1

Like many women, one of my life goals is to have a family, and a productive, cooperative relationship with my husband. I have also chosen to make nursing my career. My situation concerns my constant reckoning with my desire to have a fulfilling career, where I am making a lot of money (I have yet to get there!), equal power, and a need to feel like a good mother.

Theme #1

The subject identified a life goal of a family and a cooperative relationship as being a goal common to many women. However, her situation involved the constant reckoning with the desire to have a fulfilling nursing career and the need to feel like a good mother.

Focal Meaning #1

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around her continuing plan for a successful career and her desire to be a wife and competent mother.

Natural Meaning Unit #2

I chose to have my first child after being the head nurse of an Intensive Care Unit for two years. I had worked in this ICU for seven years total [staff nurse, assistant head nurse, and head nurse] and was feeling pretty tired of the daily routine. I had just completed the long haul of a
diploma grad to a BSN and felt "it was time to move on to bigger and better things."

Theme #2

The subject chose to have her first child after feeling tired of doing the daily tasks required of a head nurse. She wanted to move on.

Focal Meaning #2

The subject selected motherhood after experiencing satiation in her role as a first line manager.

Natural Meaning Unit #3

It was no mere coincidence that I conceived at a time when my six month maternity leave would provide me the summer off! My husband and I joked that our son was the most planned and calculated event in our lives--more than our wedding. This would be difficult for me to share openly, as summers are notorious for low staffing, and I did feel some guilt at leaving the work group in the lurch.

Theme #3

The subject intentionally conceived when her maternity leave would provide her with the summer off. She did feel guilty about leaving her work group short-staffed.

Focal Meaning #3

The subject's childbearing experience was planned to occur at an opportune time for her but not for her colleagues.
Natural Meaning Unit #4

While pregnant, I began working on my Masters degree. I thought that if I didn't plunge back in, I'd never go back. I also thought--consciously!--that I'd need my Masters to advance my career. Hence I planned to go back to my job as head nurse after my leave of absence. [I recall being pretty torn about my decision, but jumped on the working mother bandwagon, and began to berate my friends who gave up their careers to stay home with their children. They all seemed so whiney and full of complaints about never getting enough lunches out, etc. They also had husbands with incomes far exceeding our combined income.]

Theme #4

The subject began working on her Masters degree during her pregnancy, believing it was necessary for career advancement and that she must pursue it then. Her plans included returning to work after a maternity leave. She needed the income. She also believed in combining work and motherhood and berated friends who gave up their careers for parenthood.

Focal Meaning #4

The subject was committed to pursuing professional and family goals simultaneously and belittled those who were not.
Natural Meaning Unit #5

I really felt (and still do) that I didn't have a choice. If we wanted to live comfortably, and eventually buy a house, I would return to work. My maternity leave-of-absence flew by. [I agonized my entire six months about how I was going to leave my child and go back to work. We found a family day care situation near home, and my husband had the brunt of drop-off and pick-up of our son on a daily basis.]

Theme #5

The subject believed that if she wanted to live comfortably she would have to work. Before returning to work, she agonized about leaving her child but found day care and arranged for her husband to transport the child.

Focal Meaning #5

Having limited options, the subject chose to live with the comfort/discomfort of the ambivalent feelings of combining professional and family responsibilities.

Natural Meaning Unit #6

My first six months back were agony. I had continued my Masters part-time, was very involved in a local American Association of Critical Care Nurses Board of Directors and basically had no time for myself. [My job was not particularly stimulating during this time. I searched out some committee work to keep me busy, but felt I was basically biding my time until I finished school. I gave myself an ultimatum in the Spring of 1987; I would stick to working at my present
institution until my ten years for vested pension and then look for another job.] My Masters would be done in the spring; I took three courses in two semesters to finish in two years part-time. If I didn't get any job nibbles, I would get pregnant. After all, I could get pregnant and have another six months off to re-think my goals.

Theme #6

The subject's first six months back at work after maternity leave were agony. She worked on her Masters degree and was involved in other professional activities, leaving little time for herself. Her job was not stimulating so she looked for committee work to keep busy until school finished and she could change jobs. If there were no job offers, the subject would buy time with a second pregnancy.

Focal Meaning #6

After returning to her career full-time, the subject experienced distress in her professional life yet she continued to accept additional commitments. She sought and accepted professional challenges to rise above a work plateau and even considered conceiving another child if no challenges could be uncovered.

Natural Meaning Unit #7

Interestingly enough, as I was completing my Masters degree, one of the clinical assistant director of nursing jobs opened up--the one I wanted most! This meant one of those job opportunities you can't pass up. [I saw this
position as an opportunity to break into middle management and gain experience as a nurse administrator.] It also meant my children wouldn't be three years apart, since I didn't have the guts to start a new job (a big promotion, viewed by my superiors) and announce a pregnancy.

**Theme #7**

As the subject completed her Masters, a job opening as a Clinical Director of Nursing became available. It was an opportunity she could not pass up but it would delay achieving her family goal as she did not wish to start a new job and announce a pregnancy.

**Focal Meaning #7**

The subject recognized a career opportunity that she could not forfeit and she postponed a family commitment for a professional promotion.

**Natural Meaning Unit #8**

I have been an Assistant Director of Nursing for about a year now. In spite of the feelings of being overwhelmed on the job, I'm quite happy. My husband's screenwriting/film/photo career is settling in, we bought a co-op and my son is a happy, healthy 3-year-old. My baby-sitter situation (We found her when my son was a bit over a year old as the family day care we started was unusable.) is secure. She comes to us for a large chunk of money but I feel it is worth it because I have a lot of flexibility on the job. If the occasion arises that I need to work overtime, I can
without feeling too guilty about what is happening at home. I know dinner will get cooked and my son will be taken care of. I very much like this child care arrangement. It seems to fit my image of the young working female executive.

**Theme #8**

An Assistant Director for about a year, the subject was feeling overwhelmed but happy. She was pleased that her family responsibilities were not a barrier to her full-time administrative responsibilities. Despite its high cost, her babysitting situation was secure and allowed her flexibility on the job. She believed her child care arrangements fit the image of a young female executive.

**Focal Meaning #8**

The subject experienced a sense of being overwhelmed but secure as life events evolved in an expected and desired way.

**Natural Meaning Unit #9**

I'm now in the throes of when should the second child arrive. I know I want at least two children, but get very uneasy as I see my department head get extremely upset with each pregnancy announcement. The nursing department is looking at a lot of options to get people back sooner after their maternity leaves. The boss even makes comments about putting birth control pills in our coffee. I wish that a predominantly female profession could get together in supporting the nursing role to personal lives. While I
admire my boss, I wish I had some role models with children. I really get excited when I meet PhD-prepared nurses with families. I'm usually more interested in how they combined their careers and families than in their work.

Theme #9
Although the subject was aware of the administrator's attitudes regarding pregnancy and maternity leave, she looked for professional support and role models among nurses who combined professional and parental roles.

Focal Meaning #9

The subject considers the conflict between her values and those of her superiors regarding the blending of family and professional goals. She seeks to discover colleagues who successfully blend both goals.

Natural Meaning Unit #10

My dream at this point is to have that second child—four years apart—and get live-in help. [If I know that someone kind and competent is with my children, I could relax and enjoy work. I'd never have to call home and check.] However, I've been in this job almost a year and worry about losing time out for a maternity leave. [I've toyed with the idea of going to my boss and asking her which are the best four months for a leave! [I would only do this if she were sworn to secrecy—my peers would be really upset!] Yet, I really don't care where I have the next one
--if my employer and myself could benefit, I wouldn't mind.] My current view is to wait until I've been in the job three years before I deliver the second child, but I hate the idea of having children five years apart! [But it's hard to give up $45,000. My husband is really uncommitted towards a second child so there's been no decision yet.] The lack of peer, job, and professional support will probably make me wait four to five years. [I'm the oldest of four children; there's six to eight years between myself and the next sibling. I always wanted someone closer in age, hence my desire not to approach the six-year gap.]

Theme #10

The participant still wanted a second child and live-in help for child care. She worried about being away from the job too long and the financial loss of her salary, as well as her husband's lack of support for a second child. She realized the lack of peer, job, and professional support. She needed to delay her second pregnancy, despite wanting her children closer in age.

Focal Meaning #10

Struggling with conflicting feelings, the subject acknowledged life's realities and postponed family expansion in favor of career stability.

Natural Meaning Unit #11

There is something about a career that satisfies me. I have days where I say, "I'll always work--I'd be bored at
home with children and I can't afford Bloomingdales every day." I also have days where I want to live in the country, take the children to cub/girl scouts and bake bread for my family. My mother did both. She worked when I was small and took time off for the younger three--one child is brain damaged--and then went back to work. My mother is also a nurse and enjoys nursing. (She's great.) She's not as educated as I am and, therefore, has not gone as far.

**Theme #11**

The subject was satisfied with a career and enjoyed working but thought about living in the country and baking bread. She recalled how her mother, who was a nurse, was able to work and care for her children.

**Focal Meaning #11**

Pleased with her professional career, the subject reflected on additional options for family living, which included fond memories of childhood.

**Natural Meaning Unit #12**

I think about being a Vice President of Nursing when I'm 45-50 (children in college and nights out with my husband) as opposed to my mother who still does bedside nursing at age 59. Yet the need to be something is there for both of us. I wonder at times if I'm being selfish by wanting a career, an eventual PhD and a life separate from my family. There is a part of me that still views the woman as the anchor in the home--the one steady person who's
always there. I think the reason I don't have to aspire to that view is that I married someone who doesn't share that view. I think my being satisfied via a career is important to him, if it keeps me happy. The fact he shares the family responsibilities makes it easier. I also recently started paying the sitter to clean the house—in keeping with my far-reaching executive status.

**Theme #12**

The subject thought about becoming a Vice President of Nursing, questioning if she were selfish about her career. Part of her still viewed the woman as the anchor in the home but she did not aspire to live by that view since she married someone who shared her career interest and family responsibilities.

**Focal Meaning #12**

The subject contemplated challenges ahead and aspired to further career advancement, wondering whether she was too self-centered, but her fears were diminished by her spouse's genuine concern for her successful future and commitment in meeting family obligations.

**Natural Meaning Unit #13**

My office mate has a thirteen-hour day from the time she leaves Long Island to New York City. She cries every morning as she leaves her 18-month old daughter at home. Another peer has struggled for six months since coming back from maternity leave and has requested to work part-time, to
be with her ten-month old. A third peer has decided to come back for every other weekend only. Many potential role models are leaving the fold. I'm back to being the only Clinical Assistant Director of Nursing with a child. I'll be interested to see which goal takes precedence: the need to pursue optimal career paths and positive group dynamics or my desire for a second child.

Theme #13

The subject's office mate as well as other co-workers experienced difficulty leaving their small children at home when coming to work or chose to work part-time. She questioned which goal would take precedence: optimal career paths/positive group dynamics or a desire for a second child.

Focal Meaning #13

Isolated by colleagues opting to focus on parenting, the subject found herself considering anew her personal professional priorities.

Subject Number Five—Situated Structural Description

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around her continuing plan for a successful career and her desire to be a wife and competent mother. She selected motherhood at an opportune time for her, though not for her colleagues, after experiencing satiation in her role as a first line manager. The subject was committed to pursuing professional and family goals simultaneously and belittled friends who were not. Having limited options, the
subject chose to live with the comfort/discomfort of the ambivalent feelings of combining professional and family responsibilities.

After returning to her career full-time, she experienced distress in her professional life while continuing to accept additional commitments. She sought and accepted professional challenges to rise above a work plateau. She even considered conceiving another child if no challenges could be uncovered. The subject recognized a career opportunity that she could not forfeit and postponed a family commitment for a professional promotion. She felt overwhelmed but secure as life events evolved in an expected and desired way. Confronted by the conflict between her values and those of her superiors regarding the blending of family and professional goals, she sought to discover colleagues who successfully blended both goals.

Struggling with conflicting feelings, the subject acknowledged life's realities and postponed family expansion for career stability. Pleased with her professional career, she still reflected upon additional options for family living, which included fond memories of childhood. She contemplated the challenges ahead and aspired to further career advancement, wondering whether she was too self-centered, but her fears were diminished by her spouse's genuine concern for her successful future and commitment in meeting family obligations. Isolated by colleagues opting
to focus on parenting, the subject found herself considering anew her personal and professional priorities.
Subject Number Six

Natural Meaning Unit #1

When I first graduated from nursing school in 1972, my plan was that I would work for a few years as a staff nurse full-time. During that same time I would plan to get married and become pregnant. This plan also included taking a 9-month maternity leave of absence and return part-time while I raised a family. This plan that I developed is one that encompassed all that I believed to be important in my life: a successful career, a marriage and a family.

Theme #1

Upon graduation from nursing school, the subject carefully planned her future goals around her job as a staff nurse, marriage and children.

Focal Meaning #1

This subject perceived her life as including cherished beliefs and desires of success at a chosen profession, permanent companionship and parenthood.

Natural Meaning Unit #2

The first part went as planned. I got married one and a half years post graduation. But the marriage ended one and a half years later; by that time I had been working three years as an RN. I was pleased to have a job I loved and happy to be making enough money to be able to live on my own. [Working is a large part of everyone's life and having a job you enjoy makes home life easier. Since at that time
my home life was very lonely, I was exceptionally pleased that my job was fulfilling. I worked especially hard during this period in my life to cope with the pain I was experiencing from a broken marriage. I actually enjoyed putting in extra hours to get the job done. It made me feel as though I was accomplishing something important.

Theme #2

The subject's marriage was short-lived. After one and a half years, the marriage ended. She applied all her energy to her job to ease the pain from the broken marriage. Her job was something that she valued and provided a sense of self-fulfillment and accomplishment.

Focal Meaning #2

Encountering a change in her life situation, the subject set forth to overcome her sadness by immersing herself in a valued profession which brought satisfaction.

Natural Meaning Unit #3

My goal at that time was to get over my divorce and, in the future, meet someone and marry again. About two years later, I met my present husband. I had then been a nurse for five years. We dated three years and I went back to school for my BSN. My goal was still to stay a staff RN at the bedside and have a family.

Theme #3

The subject saw her goals as recovering from her divorce and remarrying while staying employed as a staff nurse.
Focal Meaning #3

The subject envisioned her future as including a period of recuperation, followed ultimately by the establishment of a satisfying relationship with a significant other, while pursuing her career.

Natural Meaning Unit #4

A year after meeting, we decided to get married. During our first year of marriage, we tried to get pregnant but I was still not pregnant. At the same time, a Nursing Care Coordinator job opened up in the PEDS ICU. Not being pregnant at the time, I decided to apply for the job. [I remembered that we just bought a house so financially I needed to work full-time, and this new position would be wonderful. I received the appointment but as time went on I didn't become pregnant so I found myself getting more and more involved in my job. My job is something that I treasure and find very important. Again, since my home life was lacking the child I so wanted, my job helped fill that void in my life. My career became the new focus of my life. I went back to school again for a Masters degree. Since I couldn't have children I was going to have a career.]

Theme #4

Having succeeded in meeting someone and getting married, the subject attempted to become pregnant but experienced difficulty. In an attempt to overcome the emptiness she felt without a child, the subject plunged into
full involvement with her job. She believed her job to be of great value and if she could not have a child at least she would have a career.

**Focal Meaning #4**

The subject realized personal success by finding a new companion, but remained unsuccessful in her quest to conceive a child, and therefore sought total immersion in valued professional activities.

**Natural Meaning Unit #5**

Much time passed and I had an opportunity to adopt but it fell through. Several months later I got a promotion to Acting Assistant Director and was delighted at my career success. Suddenly, my job had new power and prestige to it. Being an Assistant Director was very important to me; so was finishing my Masters degree. Again, I had another opportunity to adopt. I planned on finishing my degree in May. The baby was due in May; I would take two months off and come back to work. I had invested so much time and energy in my career I was not about to give it up.

**Theme #5**

The subject continued to experience career success as her hard work was rewarded by a new position of power and prestige. Simultaneously, she had the opportunity to adopt a child and was forced to reconsider her goals of a career and family.
Focal Meaning #5

The subject experienced career advancement through her persistence and dedication yet continued in her desire to achieve parenthood.

Natural Meaning Unit #6

The day finally arrived and arrangements were made so we could pick our new son up in two days. I was very happy that I was going to be a mother. [It was like a dream come true. After trying and trying to become pregnant and not being able to, I felt relieved that now my time had come. I was a mother. I had attained most of what I wanted except being a mother. Now I had the opportunity to see all my life goals fulfilled: a nursing career, a marriage and a child. I felt a personal pride. I had a Masters in Nursing Administration and a job I loved. My job helped to replace the void of not having a child. I knew at least that I was successful in my career and now I wanted the opportunity to be successful as a mother.

Theme #6

Knowing the adoption arrangements were complete, the subject rejoiced in her accomplishments and set her goals upon motherhood.

Focal Meaning #6

The subject experienced a personal fulfillment in the unfolding of her life, knowing that a cherished desire of parenthood was to be granted.
Natural Meaning Unit #7

After arriving at the hospital, I was informed the birth mother changed her mind and she was keeping the baby. I could not believe what I was hearing. I was devastated and filled with sorrow. To compensate for the pain I was experiencing, I put all my energies into my job once again. [I was so devastated. I did not achieve what I wanted most in life: a child. I should clarify that the most important thing in life to me is my husband and the wonderful relationship we have. Sharing the joy and work of raising a child is the one thing that would make my relationship with my husband even better.]

Theme #7

The subject experienced a feeling of complete devastation when informed that the birth mother decided to keep the baby. She was filled with sorrow and pain not being able to achieve what she wanted most in life, a child to complete her relationship with her husband. Therefore, to compensate for the pain she was experiencing, she put all her energies into her job.

Focal Meaning #7

The subject experienced an overwhelming sense of deprivation because of the collapse of the plans which were to have fulfilled her most cherished goal, and she again immersed herself in her profession.
Natural Meaning Unit #8

Three months after this adoption experience, I was informed that the Assistant Director of Nursing was returning to her position and that I would have to go back to being the Nursing Care Coordinator of the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. So I had no baby and no job. [For the first time, I had no job to fill the void of no child. It was a double blow to my ego.] I decided to leave the hospital after fifteen years and was able to obtain a position as an Assistant Director of Nursing for Pediatrics. I once again devoted all my time and energy to my career. [I had to make a choice to fill this void of no child by doing the thing I had most control of in my life, my career. Here, at least, I had control over daily events and could feel like I belonged to life again. Without a job or a child, there was no meaning to my life.]

Theme #8

The subject was notified that her tenure as Acting Assistant Director had ended; this notification came only three months after the subject was told she could not adopt a child. Suddenly, she had nothing in life, no job or child. To fill the void, she once again returned to her career to find meaning and satisfaction in living.

Focal Meaning #8

A change in career opportunity coupled with a feeling of barrenness led to a reconsideration of work options.
Natural Meaning Unit #9

I now have been an RN full-time for almost 16 years. My choices in life were to go 100% for career since I did not have children. In the last two years I have had every excuse in the world not to try to adopt again. (I just could not bring myself to experience the deep hurt and pain of not getting a child again. It was too much for me to handle.) If a baby fell into my lap, I would love it, but I was not going after it again. I didn't want to be hurt like that again. I'm going to be 38 years old this year. I love nursing but now I'm going to get a baby. [I am now ready to put the same kind of energies used on my career to make the reality of a child happen again. I want to commit my time to finding that child.] I want a family and for my life to be family-oriented. I have been living to work; now I want to live for my family. I have reorganized my life choices. My goal is to adopt a baby and work per diem as a bedside RN. My energies are focused away from career and into family. I am determined this time; my husband and I want a family. And we will get it!

Theme #9

After considering her age and life choices and the painful experience of adoption, the subject decided finally to commit some of the energies formerly spent on her career to finding a child. Her priorities have changed and she wants a family to be number one.
Focal Meaning #9

Having contemplated her age and options, the subject changed her priorities and dedicated herself to the pursuit of a family goal.

Subject Number Six--Situated Structural Description

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around her perception of her life as including cherished beliefs and desires of success in a chosen profession, permanent companionship and parenthood. When a marital separation changed her life situation, the subject set forth to overcome her sadness by immersing herself in a valued profession which brought satisfaction. She now envisioned her future as a period of recuperation, followed ultimately by the establishment of a satisfying relationship with a significant other, while at the same time pursuing her career. The subject realized personal success by finding a new companion, but remained unsuccessful in her quest to conceive a child. She therefore sought total immersion in valued professional activities.

She achieved career advancement through her persistence and dedication yet continued in her desire to become a mother. The subject experienced personal fulfillment in her life, as she realized her desire of adopted parenthood was to become a reality. Soon, she experienced an overwhelming sense of deprivation because of the unexpected collapse of
the adoption plans. Once again, she immersed herself in her profession.

A change in career opportunity, coupled with a feeling of barrenness, led to a reconsideration of work options. Having contemplated her age and options, the subject changed her priorities and dedicated herself to the pursuit of a family goal.
Subject Number Seven

Natural Meaning Unit #1

I experienced a major change of life goals at the time of my divorce. I had been in an unhappy marriage for twelve years when I considered separating from my husband in 1983. My previously accepted goals were the "traditional" ones of getting married and starting a family. Although I pursued a career in nursing, I ultimately felt that this work situation was of secondary importance, preceded by my home life and having a child. [I guess what I am saying is that these are two different and distinct aspects of my life--one is my home life that includes family and friends and the second is my work life that includes job duties and responsibilities. I consider my home life to take precedence over work and to be more important to me.]

Theme #1

The subject perceived her life goals to include the traditional ones of marriage, family and career but believed family and home life to be most important.

Focal Meaning #1

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around her perception of the societal goals of family and profession, with family as most valued.

Natural Meaning Unit #2

My marriage was not becoming what I had expected it to be. I felt I was growing and maturing in ways that my
husband was not. [We were not seeing things in the same light. He did not respond appropriately in meeting my needs and therefore I could not consider having children with him. Our relationship could not bear the stress of children. I expected marriage to be more fulfilling to me. I expected my husband and I to communicate and grow as a mature couple. Instead, I felt that we were two separate individuals who happened to be living in the same house together without any common interests or concerns. I found that I was looking at life like an adult, whereas my husband still wanted to go out and have fun and party all the time. We never had any serious discussions on any topic. There were few things of interest to both of us and so our discussions became fewer and fewer.]

Theme #2

The subject recognized that her marriage was not what she expected it to be. She expected fulfillment, growth and shared interests but instead experienced a separateness in her relationship with her husband.

Focal Meaning #2

The subject acknowledged her marital relationship failed to fulfill her need for intimacy and left her feeling detached and deprived.

Natural Meaning Unit #3

It was difficult for me to separate from my marriage. I soon realized that by separating I would be leaving a
comfortable home and lots of financial security. I had to develop an independence that I had not previously had. [It was difficult to separate for a number of reasons; I had never lived by myself and been an independent person. If I left this marriage, I would be faced with giving up my home, many belongings and financial security. I had to experience the loneliness of living alone. I had never thought that I would have to spend my life alone. I had to consider how I would learn to live as a single person and be alone a good part of the time. I also had to learn about financial affairs and home repairs and maintenance.] However, my happiness and peace of mind was important. [Since I was very unhappy in my marriage, I knew that the only way to change my life was to separate from my husband. I decided it was better to live alone than to live in an unhappy situation.]

Theme #3

The subject believed a marital separation would be difficult and leave her feeling insecure, lonely and dependent, but since her happiness was more important, she chose to live alone rather than remain in an unhappy marriage.

Focal Meaning #3

The subject had mixed feelings about her changing situation but opted for solitude in light of the unpleasant alternative.
Natural Meaning Unit #4

After my separation and divorce, I became more active in pursuing my own interests; I realized that my previously set goals of having a family might not be attained. [I felt very depressed about not having a child but soon began to realize that it was for the best. I knew in my heart that it was not meant to be. I now had to think seriously about my career progression and plan for the future. I realized that I might not have the option of getting married and having a family which might require me to leave my full-time position in nursing.]

Theme #4

After the separation and divorce, the subject became active in pursuing her own interests, realizing that previously assumed goals of marriage and family were not attainable. She was forced to think seriously about her career and planned accordingly.

Focal Meaning #4

When on her own, the subject eagerly sought to fulfill personal ambitions and professional success.

Natural Meaning Unit #5

Because my goals had not included a failed marriage, I now found it necessary to consider what life would be like as a single person. After much thought, I proceeded to establish my career as a personal priority and took a more active role in setting professional objectives. [This
included returning to school for my Masters in nursing, and applying for a promotion at work. All of a sudden I found myself taking risks that I didn't believe I was capable of. Feeling proud and self-confident, I was learning how to survive as a single person. I was able to fend for myself and make important financial decisions. This left me feeling like life was worth living again. Even though I was unsuccessful at my marriage, I was becoming very successful in my career. I found nursing to be exciting again and very satisfying.

Theme #5

The subject proceeded to re-establish her personal priorities after a failed marriage. She took a more active role in setting professional objectives, taking risks and learning how to survive as a single person, leading her to feel life was worthwhile.

Focal Meaning #5

The subject approached her interests anew and set forth to accomplish life challenges with renewed hope.

Natural Meaning Unit #6

After five years, I have met a man that I plan to marry in June of this year. I now see myself re-establishing my original goals of personal fulfillment in a happy marriage. [I now realize that my personal happiness is being involved in a mutually satisfying relationship.]
Theme #6

After five years of single status, the subject met a new man. She saw herself re-establishing her original goal of personal fulfillment in a marriage and realized that, for her, happiness was, in part, having a satisfying relationship.

Focal Meaning #6

The subject found a new companion and realized she was attaining her original goal of a committed and fulfilled relationship.

Natural Meaning Unit #7

I hope to have a family soon. I am getting older and I want to have a child. I feel I now can slow down my career. My nursing career is not as vital to my survival as it once was. I have indeed developed other interests besides my career and feel that I do not have to push myself to succeed professionally.

Theme #7

The subject planned to start a family and wanted to decrease her career activity. She no longer saw her nursing career as vital to her survival because of other personal interests and no longer felt the need to push for professional success.

Focal Meaning #7

The subject experienced a changed perspective in her pursuit of personal fulfillment by seeking family activities over professional endeavors.
Subject Number Seven—Situated Structural Description

For this subject, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around her perception of the societal goals of family and profession, with family as most valued. The subject also acknowledged that her marital relationship failed to fulfill her need for intimacy and left her feeling detached and deprived. She had mixed feelings about her changing situation but opted for solitude in light of the unpleasant alternative.

When on her own, the subject eagerly sought to fulfill personal ambitions and professional success. She approached her interests anew and set forth to accomplish life challenges with renewed hope. She found a new companion and realized she was attaining her original goal of a committed and fulfilled relationship. Finally, the subject experienced a changed perspective in her pursuit for personal fulfillment by seeking family activities over professional endeavors.
General Structural Description

The general structural description for this study emerged from seven situated structural descriptions which were synthesized to answer the question of study, "What is the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals for female nurse administrators in middle management positions?" The general structural description is the meaning of the phenomenon as it appeared from the analysis of the subjects' retrospective descriptions.

The experience of choosing among life goals emerges as the desire to fulfill competing ambitions, to achieve options which conflict with each other. One feels a strong desire to synchronize life events in a way that promotes multiple achievements. One chooses between two goals and then lives with the ambivalent feelings which arise from making the choice.

Confronting the desire to achieve competing goals results in a reordering of one's priorities. The opportunities and limitations which unfold make one feel both calm and unsettled, successful and defeated, secure and insecure. The calm leaves as one considers the choice between two desired goals. Disillusionment and resentment arise in aspiring toward different possibilities for self. The struggle is with clashing values when other alternatives seem possible. Turmoil and uneasiness prevail through the struggle. When a decision is finally reached, triumph and
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defeat are present all at once. The triumph emerges from a sense of accomplishment achieved through trusting in one's intuition and persisting in new and different situations; the sense of defeat and an uncomfortable ambivalence arises in giving up one cherished option for another. Having acknowledged the sadness of forfeiting the opportunities of one choice over another, one experiences a changed perspective with renewed hope. During the process of choosing, there is an abiding sense of security-insecurity. Feelings of comfort-discomfort move one from a sense of self-doubt to the possibility of being nurtured through new relationships. Realizing that some decisions arise from intuition, a sense of security surfaces when a decision "feels" right. This affirms cherished beliefs as the choice between the two goals discloses the true valued priority. There is a fulfillment in living beliefs and ideals which gives new meaning to achieving personal priorities.

Choosing among life goals is struggling to fulfill competing ambitions while experiencing paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, triumph-defeat, and security-insecurity in the process of affirming cherished beliefs.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The focus of this section is the re-examination of literature and research studies pertinent to the findings of this study.

Literature

From the general structural description of choosing among life goals, the following essential concepts can be distilled:

1. struggling to fulfill competing ambitions,
2. paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, success-defeat, and security-insecurity,
3. affirmation of cherished beliefs.

Struggling to fulfill competing ambitions

Struggling, in the context of seeking to fulfill competing ambitions, reflects a pushing-resisting force. Daniluk and Herman (1983) state that "from the earliest beginning, human beings have been required to weigh alternative courses of action and make choices regarding virtually all aspects of their lives" (p.240). In choosing between alternatives, the individual acknowledges that a decision involves more than one possible outcome (Thoen, 1979) and he or she must feel free to choose how to act, free to choose what to value, and free to form his or her character (Trusted, 1984).
Dilthey (1961) asserts that being as well as the intention of becoming is the following:

[It is] a purposefulness, the emergence of an intention to realize something, the selection and definition of a special goal, the choice means for achieving it, as well as the achievement itself. The continuous process of life which produces all this we call power . . .

It originates when we turn towards the future, which happens in different ways; in dreams of future happiness, in the play of the imagination with possibilities, in hesitation and in fear. (pp. 109-110)

Shaping one's own life is an important personal responsibility. Diamond and Allcorn (1984) define personal responsibility as a "person's willingness to assume responsibility for his or her actions and their consequences" (p. 77). Yalom uses the term responsibility "to mean authorship. To be aware of creating one's own self, destiny, life predicament, feelings, and, such be the case, one's own suffering" (p. 218). Collins and Hoyt (1972) explain that perceived choice may convey a sense of personal responsibility. Bem's (1972) self-perception theory suggests that the greater the freedom of choice an actor perceives himself or herself to have over his or her behavior, the more likely he or she should be to attribute responsibility to him or herself.
In choosing among life goals, one faces the unique dilemma of deciding between the many available avenues of personal fulfillment and satisfaction.

For each of the seven subjects, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around and emerged as an interhuman struggle to fulfill competing ambitions. For six of the seven subjects, these ambitions were related to career opportunities and childbearing and family obligations. One subject struggled to choose between conceiving a child and possessing her own home.

The priority that women place on human relationships and caring may help explain the "powering" of making personal decisions about competing ambitions. Gilligan (1982) notes that women base their decisions on moral reasoning. According to that author, women define themselves in a context of human relationships and in terms of an ethic in which caring for another is perceived as important and valid. "The ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to the need for taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone" (p. 62). Mohney and Anderson (1988) state that "as women grow older, they retain their commitment to human relationships as a basis for their actions" (p. 217).

This imperative to devote oneself to another's needs before those of self was found to be significant in the case of two subjects who forfeited their prestigious managerial
positions to be homemakers with full-time child care responsibilities. Their perception of a good parent was a person who did not work at an outside job but remained at home caring for the child. This need to care for another is one of the qualities that psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller (1976) calls a hidden strength of women. Miller believes that the moral value of caring for others experienced by women creates a sense of community and wholeness as compared with a selfish and narcissistic sense of care experienced by men. The two subjects considered in this instance were able to choose for themselves the roles and activities that suited their needs and desires but not at the cost of another.

The cost of and commitment made by women to human relationships is great (Baum & Gallagher, 1985; George & Gwyther, 1986; Goodman, 1986; Newald, 1986). There are many successes and defeats experienced while climbing the corporate ladder and maintaining the full burden of care, all of which can lead to disharmony between emotional and physical well-being and strain personal relationships (Cantor, 1983). The difficulty for women, and particularly the women in this study, is the choice to accept the dilemma of choosing or balancing between parenting and a career.

The question of whether or not to have children, a decision that was once automatic, has become a matter of choice. The experiences of the women in this study reveal a strong desire to include parenthood as an option in their
life goals. All seven subjects made the decision to re-examine their careers and personal priorities in favor of children. The findings support the subjects' acceptance of societal attitudes about what makes a happy and fulfilled life for women. Having children was such a highly valued goal that no subject challenged the idea of motherhood as a woman's duty or destiny. All subjects seemed to recognize the difficulties of parenting, however, particularly if they planned to combine it with work outside the home.

Daniluk and Herman (1983) indicate that the difficulty of the parenthood choice is for career-oriented women who have spent their early reproductive years in pursuit of educational and occupational objectives and then are faced with having to make a choice that may radically alter their present lifestyles and have far-reaching implications for the remainder of their lives. Mohney and Anderson (1988) stress the importance of the interaction of life events with women's personal motivation and goals. "Attempts to find a single trigger event or to examine events in isolation from the overall context and timing of women's lives may fail to uncover the complex interactions that are involved in human decisions" (p. 273).

Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe (1965) suggest that patterns of timing have a broader influence on human decisions and how we live our lives. At any point in time in our society, there are dominant norms that will prevail about when and in
what order a woman should assume such roles as wife, mother, and worker. Baruch et al. (1983) affirm this issue of timing as important by citing the following example:

A woman who marries early, has children in her twenties, and only later builds a career, is likely to differ in her joys and sorrows, values and attitudes from a woman who is in the workforce from young adulthood, then marries at thirty and has one or two children without interrupting her career. (p. 296)

McBride (1985) notes that women often feel so beset by responsibilities that they sometimes want to shut out all new demands because of timing. She further elaborates on timing and decision-making by stating that "you have to manage time well and constantly reassess drains on that time, but do not become so preoccupied with setting limits that you fail to recognize an opportunity when it comes along" (p. 247).

The subjects in this study envisioned their life goals not only as including their hopes and dreams but also as attempting to control their own personal destinies. These women did not refer to including others in their decision-making, not even their spouses, although they did recognize that their decisions affected the lives of others. This does not mean that the subjects did not communicate with their spouses but rather that the decision-making itself was done in isolation. They believed that this was their right.
They realized that there were advantages and drawbacks to every decision and that the consequences were their own responsibility.

For all seven subjects, personal decision-making was difficult, confusing, and accomplished through self-sustaining determination. The struggle to overcome this confusion was resolved as the tension led to new understandings and changing perspectives. In the process of selecting one chosen ideal for another, most subjects experienced pleasure in accomplishing their life goals.

**Experiencing paradoxical feelings**

In the process of human decision-making, a person is enabled to move in one direction and limited in moving in another direction. Certain choices are actualized while others are denied. According to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), cognitions may exist in dissonant, consonant, or irrelevant relationships. A person will experience cognitive dissonance only to the extent that he/she feels responsible for his/her differing behavior and the consequences of that behavior.

The state of cognitive dissonance is experienced as a psychological tension; it therefore motivates a person to reduce the dissonance in an efficient manner. Brehm and Cohen (1962) believe that the act of choosing to engage in behavior that is contrary to existing attitudes will produce cognitive dissonance.
In the process of struggling to fulfill competing ambitions, paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, success-defeat and security-insecurity emerge. A psychological tension is created and cognitive dissonance is experienced. Hilton (1962) perceives the decision-making process as initiated by some input from the environment:

input may raise dissonance above the tolerable level, causing a person to examine her premises; i.e. her beliefs and expectations about her environment and herself. If her premises can be changed to accomodate the input, she makes the change and the revised set of premises are tested for dissonance. If the person finds that her premises cannot be revised, she searches for possible alterations in her behavior, one of which may be implied by the environmental input. She selects an alternative and tests the tentative plan for dissonance. If the dissonance is below the threshold, she makes a decision to accept the tentative plan and adjusts her premises accordingly. If, when tested, the dissonance is still above the threshold, she repeats the process, either revising her premises or trying another behavioral alternative. (p. 296)

During the process of human decision-making, there are periods in which one becomes unsettled. Some are joyous times, others sad, and still others are times when confusion,
anger and conflict prevail: marriage, separation and divorce, childbirth, parenthood and career.

For two of the seven subjects, the paradoxical patterns of enabling-limiting were experienced in life events which included the desire for success at a chosen profession and permanent companionship and parenthood. For both, a failed marriage prevented the expected fulfillment of intimacy in a nurturing relationship. Both subjects were left feeling detached and deprived.

For the other five subjects, the rhythmical process of enabling-limiting emerged in attempting to combine personal and professional obligations, realizing the difficulty of pursuing both simultaneously while not foreseeing the outcomes.

These unsettling times can be viewed by an individual as a challenge or a threat. It is here that the individual is subjected to an array of emotional pushes and pulls—uneasiness, success-defeat, security-insecurity. Waston (1985) describes being unsettled as feelings of harmony-disharmony. When decision-making leads one to experience harmony-disharmony in living, then "using one's feelings" or intuition becomes an important way for dealing with incomplete or ambiguous information.

Munhall and Oiler (1986) interpret intuition as knowledge found "within a person in the form of insight that becomes present in the conscious, an idea or thought
produced by a long process of unconscious work. This is a process of discovery that is nurtured through experience with the world" (p. 29). Young (1987) further elaborates on the functional dimension of intuition by identifying applications of intuition that are both process and product. She describes the process as something in which past experiences, feelings, signals and memories are combined with the present interaction. As a result of this process, the product of intuition occurs and is recognized as knowledge.

Bastick (1982) explains the phenomenon of intuition as a universal characteristic of human thought, that intuitive experiences are common and that all human creativity begins with intuition and is then shaped by reason (p. 2). Benner and Tanner (1987) define intuition as "understanding without a rationale" (p. 23). Learning to "grasp" or understand "one's feelings" contained in certain situations may offer insight into how judgments and decisions are made. Benner and Tanner further imply that not all decisions warrant formal logic or analytic reasoning. "The problem with formal logic is that it ignores the human expertise that can be involved in ambiguous, open unstructured situations" (p. 30). In a concept analysis of intuition, Rew (1986) describes three characteristics of the phenomenon of intuition: "a) knowledge of a fact or truth, as a whole; b) immediate possession of knowledge; and c) knowledge independent of the linear reasoning process" (p. 23).
For women in particular, who Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) call subjective knowers, intuitive reaction is "something experienced, not thought out, something felt rather than actively pursued or constructed" (p. 69). In this study, the women subjects spoke of making decisions on the basis of "what felt right" rather than on rational procedures. Belenky et al. further suggest that the nature of thought and ways of knowing associated with subjectivism are conceived by women as personal, private and intuited. They identify this style of reasoning as "connected knowing," the kind of intuitive knowing observed in women. It is a way of knowing whereby the individual attempts to integrate intuitively felt knowledge with knowledge learned from others, an integration of rational and subjective knowing. For these subjects, decision-making involved an active gathering together of their life situations and scattered particulars into an experienced whole. The process always focused on their personal responsibilities, relationships and connectedness with the realities of the situations. The determining force which influenced the fulfillment of certain life goals was subjective familiarity, the direct feeling of the experience. The subjects selected one option over another based on intuition or synthesis of life events rather than analytical reasoning. Therefore, intuition as a way of understanding women's thinking is perceived to be a perspective from which to know and
experience the world. Again, Belenky et al. suggest that drawing upon women's perspectives and values can help shape the way they view themselves and their minds as well as reveal what real life decision-making and moral dilemmas "feel like."

Baruch et al. (1983) uncovered that some women feel pressured or resentful when they realize that they have to choose but that making one's own choices about the future is crucial:

For women, there are greater opportunities to choose now than at any time in our history. But sometimes opportunities are mixed blessings; when you have the power to make your own decisions, you have the opportunity to make mistakes. The outcome can't be guaranteed. While having options is crucial, being in charge of your own life isn't easy. It's important to be aware that it's hard and sometimes feels lonely and downright scary. You might not make the right choice. You might fail at something you choose to do. (p. 49)

In struggling to fulfill competing ambitions, while experiencing paradoxical feelings, a person demonstrates the capacity to knowingly rearrange the environment to exercise choices (Rogers, 1970). He or she freely chooses meaning in situations and bears responsibility for those personal decisions (Parse, 1981).
Affirming cherished beliefs

While affirming cherished beliefs, one's value system emerges and guides one's experience, social interactions and worldview. Through the valuing process, attitudes and cherished beliefs are freely chosen, prized and acted upon (Raths, Harmin & Simon, 1978). Winkler (1983) sees the valuing process as "mirroring a person's worldview (belief system) as it arises from the environment" (p. 281). Warnock's (1970) perspective of living beliefs and ideas through the world is described as

a place in which each by herself has the power to choose her own life from the foundations, to choose what she is to be, because she can choose what to value. But since this is true for each of us, it follows each must take full responsibility for her choice alone. The only obedience to cultivate is obedience to one's own ideal. (pp. 21-22)

Connor and Becker suggest that values can be expressed as "global beliefs about desirable end-states underlying attitudinal and behavioral processes" (p. 551). Tiedman (1964) believes that "attitudes can influence decisions; decisions can be followed by actions; actions define lifestyle" (p. 375). Therefore, how people think about their situations and act upon them is related to social norms, social ideology and social organization (Gilbert, 1982). Belenky et al. (1986) explain that
our basic assumptions about truth, knowledge and reality are shaped by the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definition of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, and our sense of control over our life events. (p. 3)

For each subject, the experience of affirming beliefs involved deep reflection and the trusting of personal intuition while prioritizing values. For two of the seven subjects, affirming cherished beliefs emerged from a decision to start a family and suspend energies committed toward nursing and professional success.

For another two subjects, the affirming of cherished beliefs emerged in the decision to forfeit their nursing careers upon the birth of a child. These two subjects experienced discomfort and resentment about postponing the achievement of their professional goals, but valued the time spent with a growing child as more important than career success.

The last of the seven subjects affirmed her cherished beliefs in attempting both to conceive a child and possess her own residence. She experienced a sense of personal failure at her inability to conceive a child, yet continued trying to achieve this goal because it was still important to her.

Thus, the dimensions of human existence, the realms of meaning and values, give direction and strength in life;
they guide and coordinate life. In Frankl's (1967) view, we must find a personal meaning in life, and must actualize values in the concrete circumstances of our existential situation.

Valuing is living cherished beliefs and chosen ideals. The cherished beliefs are reflected and revealed through attitudes and behaviors which influence decisions and represent the structure of a personal reality, a chosen life style.

Research studies

A search of the literature revealed that no research studies had been conducted to investigate and uncover the meaning of the experience of choosing among life goals. There were, however, two investigations both of which were conducted from the theoretical perspective of Man-Living-Health (Parse, 1981). Santopinto's (1989) investigation of the relentless drive to be ever thinner, and Banonis's (1988) investigation of the lived experience of recovering from addiction both used Giorgi's (1975) qualitative structural method of phenomenology and addressed phenomena similar to this study.

Santopinto (1989) found that the relentless drive to be ever thinner is a persistent struggle toward an imaged self lived through withdrawing-engaging. Living the relentless drive to be ever thinner means that a person struggles to assert self against images of nonbeing, freely choosing
opportunities and limitations which confirm the meaning of now (p. 30).

Banonis (1989) found that the lived experience of recovering from addiction is the struggle to pull self out of a well of darkness into the comfort of light. "Recovering from addiction is experienced as profound shifts from a narrow, limited, powerless struggle to survive to an open, expansive freedom to actualize potentialities; . . . to engage in the process of becoming, aware of freely choosing from all the possibilities" (p. 41). This is experienced as the person lives profound shifts in ways of being and experiences the rhythm of enabling-limiting as he/she separates from the limiting ways of being in addiction and connects to ways of being which are open to the many possibilities of becoming. "The rhythm of control and surrender is reflected in taking responsibility for choices while letting go of determining outcomes" (p. 42).

Both Santopinto and Banonis addressed lived experiences that surface in a human-environment interrelationship and found that the concepts of powering and enabling-limiting are meaningful to the phenomenon. From this researcher's perspective, the phenomenon of this investigation is a common human experience surfacing in the human-environment interrelationship, to which the concepts of powering and enabling-limiting are valuable. The connectiveness of the phenomena of the Santopinto and Banonis investigations to
the phenomena of this investigation, the use of a common qualitative research method, as well as a shared theoretical perspective, demonstrate the relevance of these two studies to the findings of this study.

There are several qualitative investigations and one life-historical investigation of major life decisions which are relevant to the experience of choosing among life goals.

In their research to identify some of the consequences of a woman's life plans, such as the timing of parenthood, especially in the sphere of employment, Weingarten and Daniels (1978) examined family-timing patterns by means of intensive interviews with parents who had their first child "early" or "late." Using "network sampling" procedures, a sample of 72 couples representing three generations a decade apart was obtained. One third of the sample (24 couples) were in their late 20s-early 30s, one third in their late 30s-early 40s, and one third in their late 40s-early 50s. A standardized interview format was designed with the following findings:

1. There is a dramatic difference in the impact of the transition to parenthood on women's and men's work histories.

2. Women accommodate their work life to meet the needs of their family. Two different patterns of accommodation were identified: one a sequential and the other a simultaneous solution to combining family and employment. Each pattern is associated with a particular kind of transition experience.
Women who work outside the home simultaneously with raising young children make daily transitions from one sphere to the other, while women who wait to enter the paid labor force until their children are older experience a more radical transition from one primary occupation to another.

3. Those women who are able to choose the timing of their entry or re-entry into the paid labor force describe the timing in terms of their readiness in relation to their children.

Increasingly, more adult women are combining parenthood and employment. Weingarten and Daniels' (1978) findings demonstrate that when women have children, parenthood becomes a context in which occupational choices are thought about and made. Moreover, the responsibilities of a woman's career influence the choices and decisions of parenthood and family life.

The literature reveals that women are raising important questions about the sequence and timing of family and career, questions that challenge the traditional conceptions of the substance and chronology of generativity in women's lives (Erikson, 1968; McBride, 1973).

Mohney and Anderson (1988) found in a study of the role of life events and the morality of relationships, in the lives of 38 women between the ages of 25-46, that the priority that women place on considering relationships in making their decisions may help explain such
sequences as partial education, marriage, children, job, more education and career, which are uncommon for men but common for women. In the sequences for women, life events and relationships seem to play more of a role than they do in men's sequences. (p. 271)

Dimidjian's (1983) biographical research, completed on six female psychotherapists in their thirties, "indicated that these women's lives evidenced psychosocial development which was neither so linear nor so work oriented as previously identified" (p. 33). The focus of Dimidjian's interviews was to establish a feminine identity during the years of 18-40 which sequentially included

1. "the establishment of enduring relational ties with a Special [sic] other, other adults and (for some subjects, children);"

2. "maintaining a professional identity which is both internally valued and externally-validated;" and

3. "developing an increasing awareness of intrapsychic aspects of self" (p. 33).

The findings of the Dimidjian study revealed that during the early/mid-thirties, subjects underwent a self-critical period of assessment, and by the late thirties each subject was attempting to maintain and balance a multi-faceted identity which encompassed rational bonds, professional achievement and internal growth (p. 34).
Granrose (1985) examined the kind of decision-making process which young women use when they formulate an intention to work following childbirth. A "subjective-expected utility model" and a "decision rule analysis" were used for a selected sample of 202 upper class women in a large urban university. The conclusions from Granrose's study emphasize that women seem to be formulating their intentions to work following childbirth on their perception of a few key factors: child welfare, family income and career advancement.

Individual variation in the relative value of financial rewards, personal ambition, and child welfare are key determinants of intentions and behavior. This is an indication that these particular values should be classified in order to promote decision-making that will lead to consistent, stable career plans. (p. 228)

The last two decades have seen a shift away from the traditional values of the female role in society, particularly as they apply to women who elect to work, for either economic need or personal fulfillment, and women who choose to remain at home, for childcare and family obligations (Betz, 1982; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979; Matthews & Tiedman, 1964; Watley & Kaplan, 1971). To determine whether value shifts have actually occurred, Pirnot and Dustin (1988) studied the possibility of value change as it applied to two female population groups, homemakers and career women, and
the value differences between these two groups. A survey of the basic life values of 93 women found that significant changes in the value priorities of homemakers and career women did indeed occur as compared with studies of these groups in previous decades. Both groups placed high priority on aesthetic values (self-actualization, individualism, and self-sufficiency) and economic values. Homemakers, however, placed a relatively high priority on religious values, as compared with the strong political interests of career women.

Thus, although needs for self-actualization seem to be strong in homemakers, the relative lack of political interest toward expression of those needs beyond the traditional female environment (i.e. the home), coupled with strong religious conviction for adherence to the traditional role, may tend to motivate women who hold these values toward fulfillment in traditionally female roles. (p. 435)

Despite the shift away from the traditional values of the female role in society and the increasing number of women in the labor force, there remains little research available which describes the values and successes of women in leadership and authority positions in female-dominated professions (Collins, 1984). A national stratified sample of 300 women administrators in nursing, social work and education revealed that these women experienced societal and
structural barriers in their career development and achievement. Nearly 70% of these subjects expressed difficulty in balancing career and family obligations.

Collins suggests that vocational and homemaking participation are not mutually exclusive, but that this dual-role lifestyle presents unique challenges for women. The structural and societal barriers confronting gender-related occupations identified in the Collins study revealed the following forms of sex discrimination: "differential salaries for women and men; unwillingness to delegate responsibility to women; differential treatment between men and women regarding tenure, leave and benefits" (p. 31).

Being able to change these discriminatory policies towards women requires that women recognize that what is happening to them is social and political in nature. Collins (1983) and others (Baruch et al., 1983) suggest that women fight for changes that will facilitate women's and men's participation in meeting family life and career obligations as well as childcare services, flexible time schedules and improved parental leave benefits.

Eccles (1987) feels that women must legitimize their choices while acknowledging the impact of rigid "gender role-socialization" on these choices. Eccles believes that these achievement-related choices reflect "an individual's perception and attitude resulting from socialization experiences, an individual's interpretation of . . ."
[her] performance history . . ., and finally, the individual's perception of various behaviors and goals" (p. 138).

A Life-historical investigation of major life decisions, conducted by Sloan (1983) and using ten adult subjects, revealed that reporting a general life history and early memories can elucidate what a future might entail. Each subject was requested to speculate on an ideal future, realistic future, and worst possible future. Verbatim transcripts were analyzed to isolate themes in each projected future (p. 560). Sloan explained that the "interpretation of fantasied futures should aim to clarify the thematic representation of conflicts giving rise to decision problems. This can be accomplished by linking the themes of the subject's basic life narrative and early memories to current dilemmas and to symbolic resolutions or compromises evidenced in the projected personal futures" (p. 564).

Sloan (1983) suggests that it is possible to reduce major life decisions to problem definition, survey of options, evaluation of alternatives, and response selection, but that there is no guarantee that these processes will uncover various forms of false consciousness, temperament, and social conditioning (p. 565). A major paradox to be resolved in studying and understanding life decisions is that life choices are not only concerned with immediate
personal experiences but also are the embodiment of "collective issues"—an individual's values, beliefs and worldview (Sloan, 1983).

The individual's ability to structure his or her future life decisions must include taking into consideration the current reality of his/her constraints and possibilities as well as the enabling-limiting nature of each decision. Sartre's (1968) definition of what is relevant to understanding an individual's life course, in relation to his/her development in the field of possibilities, yields the following description:

For us man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation, and by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made . . . . The most rudimentary behavior must be determined both in relation to the real and present factors which condition it and in relation to a certain object, still to come, which it is trying to bring into being. (p. 97)
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this investigation was to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals. Seven married female nurse administrators between the ages of 27-37 years, who were in middle management positions in two New York City metropolitan hospitals, provided written descriptions of situations in which they found themselves choosing among life goals. These written descriptions were analyzed using Giorgi's (1975) qualitative structural analytic method of phenomenology. The analysis generated a situated structural description for each subject, which contained the components of the lived experiences. The seven situated structural descriptions were then synthesized into a general structural description, which contained the meaning of the lived experience of the phenomena, studied from the perspective of all the subjects.

The general structural description represents the answer to the research question "What is the meaning of the lived experience of choosing among life goals for female nurse administrators in middle management positions?", and is the major finding of this phenomenological investigation. The answer which emerged was: choosing among life goals is struggling to fulfill competing ambitions while experiencing
paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, success-defeat, and security-insecurity in the process of affirming values and beliefs.

Findings from the study, which used the principles of Parse's (1981) Man-Living-Health theory, agreed with that author's concepts of powering (struggling to fulfill competing ambitions), enabling-limiting (paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, success-defeat, and security-insecurity), and valuing (affirming cherished beliefs). From these and from the research findings, the following structure was developed: choosing among life goals is powering the enabling of valuing. This structure is the researcher's theoretical view of the lived experience being investigated in the study.

Conclusions

The findings of this investigation illuminated the following areas of the nursing and female experiences.

Nursing science

The findings of this study not only support and corroborate Parse's (1981) theory of Man-Living-Health but also confirm its usefulness as a framework for the study of common human experiences. The lived experience of choosing is a universal one which arises from the human-environmental interrelationship. Omery (1983) states that "the nursing profession is proud of its identification as a humanistic
discipline. The profession's values and beliefs include a view that the human phenomenon is holistic and meaningful" (p.62). Thus, the findings from this investigation enhance nursing theory by expanding the body of nursing knowledge, in that the beliefs and behavior of subjects and meaning of the lived experience are uncovered and understood. Glaser and Strauss (1967) support the contention that an appropriate method for theory building is introspection, reflection or experience.

**Nursing research**

The research for this study was conducted using the Giorgi modification of the phenomenological method. The findings strongly supported the value of this technique for capturing the meaning of phenomena experienced in the human life process. Through it, the experience and perceptions of the female nurse administrator subjects led the researcher to the discovery, understanding and interpretation of a lived experience. The phenomenological method proved to be an appropriate one for conducting research on human experience because it is able to elucidate social, cultural, political and familial influences.

The Giorgi analytical method, although developed as a technique in non-nursing human science research, was successfully used in research with a nursing science perspective. This study was enhanced by Giorgi's descriptive method of phenomenology. Through the rigorous inductive
process which is a part of the technique, the structural meaning of choosing among life goals emerged. Thus, the usefulness of the phenomenological method for research conducted from a nursing perspective was supported.

Women's lived experiences

The qualitative approach of phenomenology used to study the lived experience of female nurse administrators helped to reveal aspects of decision-making in the lives of these women. This approach to research captures the more salient features of women's social world as the self-reports of women's own experiences reveal important data (MacPherson, 1983). Studying the written descriptions of the seven subjects, the researcher was able to uncover the meaning of personal decision-making for them in relation to the situations surrounding their lives. She was able to delineate their concerns and the consequences of certain choices.

A major life choice which emerged from this investigation was the choice to accept parenthood or a career or both. Being in a role that one desires was seen to be important to the subject's well-being; it resulted in personal satisfaction and fulfillment. The theme of achievement and work--job, education and career goals as well as child care concerns--dominated the written descriptions. The subjects placed different values on life roles at each life stage. The two oldest subjects, aged 37 and 39, put greater emphasis on having
a child and being a mother than on career advancement and success.

Gerson (1985) suggests that women have coped with the multiple demands of work and family by the continual process of renegotiation with their social and personal situations and reassessment of their own goals and options. Personal decision-making is influenced by an individual's self schemas as well as socialization pressures, gender role beliefs and cultural norms. Eccles (1987) suggests that gender affects decision-making in that males and females, on average, have different although equally important goals for their lives and that these goals themselves may change over a lifetime as roles and obligations change.

It was clear from these descriptions that the subjects experienced a self-imposed pressure to synchronize life events in a way that promoted multiple achievements. Baruch et al. (1983) describe this self-imposed pressure as doing and achieving, and believe these are at least as important to the lives of women as relationships and feelings. If doing and achieving are neglected in a woman's life, then her self-esteem is endangered (p. 29). And the decisions made by the subjects regarding their personal and professional lives forced them to re-examine their relationships, their careers and their priorities in terms of doing and achieving.

But personal decision-making for these subjects also was clearly influenced by their connection to others—by their
close relationships and by their commitment to these relationships in terms of care. It was evident from the subjects' descriptions that their life choices were rarely, if ever, made in a vacuum.

Women base their decisions about when to go to school, when to work and when to bear children on a different set of values than men (Mohney & Anderson, 1988) in which relationships are subordinate to the ongoing process of individualization and achievement. Women are never disconnected from their awareness of others. Thus the importance that these subjects placed on considering their relationships with spouses, employees and children demonstrates their commitment to balancing personal decisions and goals with the conflicting demands of and responsibilities for those they care for or work with.

**Implications and Recommendations**

The implications of this investigation are relevant. Practicing nurses always focus on new questions. Researchers seek to answer questions and when doing so, enhance nursing's knowledge base and contribute to the development of nursing as a scientific discipline.

**Nursing theory**

The use of Man-Living-Health theory offers new and different ways to understand significant nursing phenomena.
Parse (1987) describes the individual as an open being, more than and different from the sum of the parts. This being is in mutual simultaneous interchange with the environment, chooses from options, and bears responsibilities for choice. In choosing to live his/her cherished beliefs, an individual relates to the world through paradoxical rhythmical patterns (enabling-limiting), and comes to know and prize his/her chosen values.

The general structural description generated in this study seemed to correspond with the principles of \textit{Man-Living-Health} and reflect Parse's themes of transcendence, rhythmicity and meaning.

Struggling, considered in the context of seeking to fulfill competing ambitions, is linked to Parse's theme of transcendence. The author views struggling as a pushing-resisting force. She describes this pushing-resisting as the dynamics, or "powering," in every encounter which creates tension and sometimes conflict as new possibilities unfold. This powering occurs as a vital life force in an individual's struggles to choose between competing and equally desirable goals.

For each of the seven subjects, the experience of choosing among life goals centered around and emerged as an interhuman struggle to fulfill competing ambitions. For six
of the seven subjects, these ambitions were related to career opportunities and childbearing and family obligations. One subject struggled to choose between conceiving a child and possessing her own home. Each subject experienced feelings of being torn or trapped as they chose beyond the immediate moment without knowing the full consequences of the choice.

For all seven subjects, personal decision-making was difficult, confusing, and accomplished through self-sustaining, instinctual determination. The struggle to overcome this confusion was resolved as the tension led to new understandings and changing perspectives. In the process of selecting one chosen ideal for another, most subjects experienced pleasure in accomplishing their life goals.

Paradoxical feelings, such as calmness-turmoil, success-defeat, and security-insecurity, are perceived by Parse as rhythmical patterns. Her concept of enabling-limiting is defined by the paradoxical feelings of choosing among competing goals where there are both opportunities and limitations resulting from the choice. In living both opportunities and limitations at the same time, a person is both calm and settled, successful and defeated, secure and insecure. Parse calls this rhythmical process "enabling-limiting": "To choose one way means to give up other ways. There are an infinite number of possibilities in a particular choice; also an infinite number of limitations" (p. 50).
For two of the seven subjects, the paradoxical patterns of enabling-limiting were experienced in life events which included the desire for success at a chosen profession and permanent companionship and parenthood. For both, a failed marriage prevented the expected fulfillment of intimacy in a nurturing relationship. Both subjects were left feeling detached and deprived, but regained their sense of self by immersing themselves in professional activities and career promotions. As they achieved personal fulfillment through professional success, the subjects experienced a sense of security. Later, after reconsidering their life goals, they found themselves changing priorities by seeking family goals in preference to professional endeavors.

For the other five subjects, the rhythmical enabling-limiting emerged as they attempted to combine personal and professional obligations, knowing the difficulty of pursuing both simultaneously, while not knowing the outcomes. Of these five subjects, two had misgivings about delegating parental duties and chose to provide themselves as a consistent, loving care giver. In doing so, they experienced disillusionment and frustration in suppressing professional fulfillment and identity. Both resented and felt unsettled having to choose between two desired goals concurrently. They were successful in achieving their most desired goal, parenting. They valued the opportunities for special moments of parenting more than the pursuit of professional
ambitions. The security-insecurity experienced by these two subjects was lived in the satisfaction of witnessing a child's growth and development while experiencing ambivalent feelings about not fostering their professional potential.

Another two of the seven subjects experienced the rhythmical patterns of enabling-limiting as they aspired to successful nursing careers while wanting to be competent wives and mothers. Both subjects felt that financial obligations limited their choice about returning to work. These subjects lived the turmoil and unsettledness of combining professional and family responsibilities. Despite experiencing uneasiness and chaos, both subjects moved beyond their feelings of apprehensiveness by launching new professional roles which helped them grow and brought increased power and prestige. Satisfied by achieving professional success, both subjects experienced a sense of security as life events evolved in an expected and desired way. Insecurity emerged from the intense discomfort of having to choose between another child or continuing to pursue career advancement, as well as from recognizing the potential risks of leaving a small child at home. Faced with competing values, each subject approached life with determination to achieve personal and family success.

The last of the seven subjects experienced the struggle to fulfill competing ambitions as she strove to conceive a child and was confronted with varied options. She was
frustrated in her attempts to fulfill her goal of bearing a child. She felt personal failure and disappointment over her inability to conceive a child. While struggling to live with the personal turmoil created by her barrenness, the subject pursued another valued option. She felt defeated again when faced with the financial limitations which forced a choice between acquiring a home or a baby. Struggling with this unforeseen dilemma, the subject chose the purchase of a home, but soon lived the joy of success when she conceived her child. She trusted her instinct while living with security-insecurity and accomplished her life goals.

Affirming beliefs, or achieving personal priorities, is a component of Parse's theme of meaning. The essential idea in affirming cherished beliefs is reflected in her concept of valuing. She describes valuing as "a process of confirming cherished beliefs that reflects one's world-view . . . . [or] imaged options" (p. 45).

For each subject, the experience of affirming cherished beliefs involved deep reflection and the trusting of personal intuition while prioritizing values. For two of the seven subjects, affirming cherished beliefs emerged from a decision to start a family and suspend energies committed toward nursing and professional success. Both subjects felt the pressures of advancing age and the desire for family activities in preference to professional endeavors as a basis for their changing perspective on life choices.
Another two subjects affirmed cherished beliefs by deciding to pursue professional career goals and family goals simultaneously. Both of these subjects experienced feelings of ambivalence associated with being working parents but recognized that the financial benefits and professional prestige outweighed the conflicting emotions felt when separating from loved ones to pursue goals.

For another two subjects, the affirming of beliefs emerged in the decision to suspend their nursing careers upon the birth of a child. These two subjects were unsettled and resented postponing their professional goals, but valued the time spent with a growing child as more important than career success.

The last of the seven subjects affirmed her cherished beliefs in attempting both to conceive a child and possess her own residence. She experienced a sense of personal failure at her inability to conceive a child, yet continued trying to achieve this goal because it remained important to her.

The essential idea that emerges from the general description is that choosing among life goals is struggling to fulfill competing ambitions while experiencing paradoxical feelings of calmness-turmoil, success-defeat, and security-insecurity, in the process of affirming beliefs. From this general description, a theoretical structure can be developed by using the principles and concepts of the Man-Living-Health theory, particularly powering, enabling-limiting and
valuing. The structure of choosing among life goals can be described as powering the enabling-limiting of valuing. The findings from this research study are supportive of Parse's theory.

This investigation contributed to the theory which establishes nursing as a human science (Parse, 1981, pp. 3-8) and seeks to advance nursing as a distinct scientific discipline (Donaldson & Crowley, 1978). Further research studies are necessary to the complete definition of nursing as a science. Those which use the perspective of the Man-Living-Health theory will further prove its applicability to nursing.

Nursing research

The second implication for nursing research, emerges from the uncovering of the meaning of lived experience. Research which seeks to describe and understand human existence enables nurses to transcend the merely physical and reach an understanding of lived phenomena which will indicate what it means to be human (Koestenbaum, 1978). Through the findings of this study, the researcher was able to connect the basic concepts of struggling to fulfill competing ambitions, freely choosing opportunities and limitations and affirming beliefs to a theoretical structure and to a nursing perspective.

The findings from this investigation suggest that further studies should be directed toward asking subjects to
describe a situation where they experienced difficulty, conflict, or discomfort, or exhilaration, happiness, or comfort. Studies based on these lived experiences would further expand knowledge of the phenomena of health and human existence by means of theoretical structures and thus offer a further contribution to nursing science and research. By studying a lived experience, knowledge about an individual's health becomes known. "Health is an open process of becoming, a continuously changing process in which man knowingly participates. It is a synthesis of values, a way of living" (Parse et al., 1985, p. 28).

**Nursing practice**

Nursing practice is based on a body of knowledge and identified interventions which help predict and control human responses. A substantive knowledge base is essential for nursing practice (Winkler, 1983). By applying the findings of this investigation to nursing practice, the nurse administrator would be more in touch with and better able to assist others (subordinates, clients and their families as well as other health professionals) as they participated in self-discovery through the exploration of choices.

Decisions made by nurse administrators in their work affect other individuals as well as themselves. Making correct decisions is essential to nursing practice, especially at a time of rising costs and increasing
scarcity of resources. The role of a nurse administrator in the health care setting dictates that she take on more responsibility and be held accountable for her decisions and actions. With this increased accountability for nursing decisions and behavior, it is necessary for nurses to understand more fully the structures and processes by which decisions are made. Furthermore, it is necessary to determine what factors might influence decisions and how the decision-making process can be taught and learned.

It is also important for women administrators to help other women to look realistically at their responsibilities and at their own and others' needs. Women administrators need to validate women's concerns for those they care for and to recognize that women will continue to regard relationships as an important factor in making personal decisions. Simultaneously, women administrators can help other women to evaluate their commitments and help them balance their family and professional roles. Continual re-evaluation is a necessity because choices are no longer lifetime decisions (Collier, 1982).

Women administrators need to be aware, for their own and others' benefit, of the wide variation in the timing of life events. There is a constant need to examine the progression of women's traditional life events and personal decisions. The change in the sequence and timing
of life choices became evident, at least for women, during this investigation.

Recommendations for further study

It is recommended:

--that this investigation be replicated, asking subjects to describe a situation in which they experienced difficulty, conflict and discomfort, or exhilaration, happiness and comfort, in choosing among life goals;

--that this investigation be replicated with different samples to compare similarities and differences in the meaning of the lived experience (examples: graduate or staff nurses, adolescent and single women, and males in middle management positions);

--that continued research be done utilizing Parse's (1981) nursing perspective and the Giorgi (1975) qualitative research method of phenomenology to advance nursing science;

--that continued research be conducted in which the subjects are asked to validate their decisions and life choices, using nurses in comparison to other female professionals;

--that continued research be conducted in how the amount of control that hospitals have on an individual's life (days off, maternity leave) affects autonomous decision-making;

--that continued research be conducted in why some individuals refuse to make certain decisions;
--that continued research be conducted in why nursing administration remains inflexible about facilitating work and family responsibilities for middle managers;

--that continued research be done utilizing an open-ended narrative approach for data analysis.
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Bowie, MD: Brady Communications.


Appendix A

Protection of Subject's Rights

Consent Form

I agree to participate in a doctoral research project being conducted by Donna M. Costello-Nickitas, a doctoral candidate at Adelphi University, Marion A. Buckley School of Nursing, Garden City, New York. I understand that I will write about an experience related to "choosing among life goals." There are no apparent risks associated with this project. A possible benefit of participating might be that I will have an opportunity to explore and examine my thoughts and feelings about myself. I may call the researcher should uncomfortable feelings surface as a result of my recollections. I know that at any time during the study I may completely withdraw without any penalty or prejudice. I understand that all data collected in this study will remain confidential and that I will not be identified by name or description in the study whether written or verbal.

I received a copy of this consent form.

Researcher: ___________________ Subject: ________________

Donna M. Costello-Nickitas, Ph.D. Candidate

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Appendix B

Human Subjects Review
The Experience of Choosing Among Life Goals

Name: ____________________________________________
Age: _____________________________________________
Title: _____________________________________________
Years in current position: __________________________

You are invited to participate in a doctoral research project, the purpose of which is to gain an understanding of the human experience of "choosing among life goals." There are no known risks related to your participation. Though conclusions from this research project may be published, no names will be associated with the data and the information you share will be treated confidentially.

You may withdraw from this study at any time. The project may require 30-40 minutes or more of your time to write about a personal experience. You will probably be asked by the investigator to further elaborate on a section of the description once it is read by her.

Thank you,

Donna M. Costello-Nickitas, R.N.C., M.A.
Doctoral Candidate

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Appendix C

Subject's Worksheet

DESCRIBE A SITUATION IN WHICH YOU EXPERIENCED CHOOSING AMONG LIFE GOALS. THE SITUATION MAY HAVE OCCURRED IN ONE MOMENT IN TIME OR IT MAY HAVE OCCURRED OVER A LONGER PERIOD. SHARE ALL THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS UNTIL YOU HAVE NO MORE TO SAY ABOUT THE SITUATION.