**A group of people smiling

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**Middle-Aged Resiliency and Resistance Study (MARRS):**

**Qualitative Study of the Influence of Ageism and Age-Inclusivity on the Midlife Years**

**Table of results for the middle-aged sample (ages 45 to 64 years):**

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| **Themes** | **Subthemes** |
| Diverse experiences of the midlife | * Overall contentment   *[I have the] freedom [to] travel to places that 15 or 20 years ago, I wouldn't have had the ability or the capacity to travel to because when children were younger and financially it wasn't available to pursue those kinds of leisure events. (B-11, woman).* |
| * Common challenges   *[A]s a result of not being able to get back into the workforce, I had [to] go on social assistance. As I go to the food bank, I can't afford the necessities. Uh, I have, you know, I just scrape by, I go without all the time. (B-04, woman).* |
| * Maintaining resilience in the face of challenges   *It won't be just wrong to totally give up. Right. And I, I don't think that that's ever been, [but] I'm a fighter, right? Um, I'm just, I'm the kind of person that's gonna be the Phoenix, you know, that rises from the ashes. (B-04, woman).* |
| * Unique experiences   *Well, menopause, menopause. And unfortunately, that takes up a good chunk of midlife. For me, it started at age 39 and I just turned 56 and I'm not, and I'm not done it. So that's quite a number of years. Um, so that's definitely unique to that time. (B-13, woman).* |
| * Re-evaluation of choices   *I believe midlife is unique in that you're in that place in your life where you can see back, and you could see forward, and you can evaluate, and you can plan, and you could make changes based on the experiences that you've had. So, you're kind of like when you're young, you don't have as many years to look back on, you know, when you're older, it's pretty much all backwards, you know? And so, um, yeah, it's kind of like, I believe that's unique. You still have, at least in theory, time to re-evaluate and make new plans. (B-13, woman).* |
| Change is constant as we age | * Not worrying about what others think   *I think you're probably less influenced by things, this, the things that you were when you were younger. So, you know, probably popularity and looks and all those kinds of things that are important when you're, when you're younger, you, you care less about and you can be more yourself, more authentic (B-06, woman).* |
| * Embracing the aging process   *I haven't really gone through any kind of depression, or I don't hate the thought of getting old. I see it as a natural progression. I’ve watched my mother age gracefully and she had a wonderful life (B-15, woman).* |
| * Degree of accepting aging as a personal choice   *She [participant’s mother] can't handle looking in the mirror and seeing all the wrinkles and where, you know, I feel like that's just an acceptance of who you are. Right. But that's my mentality and then I see other women in my community who, you know, love, you know, don't dye their hair, and just accept who they are. And I think it's, I think it's a real personal choice (B-22, woman).* |
| * Looking forward with hope, fear, and uncertainty   *I'm hoping that I have good health, um, you know, 40, 50 sixties. I'm 58, so I can't wait until I can retire. Um, that's exciting for me to be able to maybe do some hobbies, do more reading, just exercise every day as opposed to when you're, when you have time or, yeah, I think, um, like I, I'm looking forward to more grandchildren and being there to help if I can (B-14, woman).* |
| * Redefining relationships   *My relationships with my, my husband. And my daughters that changed too. I went from being more of a parent in my forties because they were teenagers coming up to that, that timeframe to now being more of I'm still their mom, but I don't need to mom them as much as I, I used to. It's a different relationship now. And, and my husband, it's re-establishing ourselves as partners because we don't have that added stressor of taking care of the children in the same way. So, I see that evolution now to more, more relationship focused in my fifties (B-11, woman).* |
| * Changing bodies   *Before I found out that I was diabetic, I did not exercise at all. I hadn't stepped foot into a gym. I wasn't involved in any kind of sports whatsoever. And if anything, finding out that I was diabetic spurred me into more action. So, I am I'm active from the perspective of, I I'm always doing things, but now the physical activity has ramped up considerably because I don't want to end up losing a limb, going blind, going on dialysis. So, if it's in my control to manage it, then it's my responsibility to do that. The it's, it's just part of my nature. So no, it's not like, oh, I'm going to show where everybody that I'm not middle age. That no, that's not what it is (B-11, woman).* |
| * Changing interests and hobbies   *I'm less inclined to do foolish things than they are. I don't know whether that's age or just, you know, being the oldest [...] and that makes a difference too, right, being the oldest in the family and being that much older. Um, you're instilled with a huge sense of responsibility. And sometimes it’s hard to let go (B-10, woman).* |
| * Adapting in unprecedented times   *[I’m] just thinking like technology is a big one for me. My girls will say, you know, I'll ask them how to do something and they'll say, “try to Google it mom, and figure it out.” Well, I can Google it, but I don't really understand what I'm supposed to be doing because technology is just… All the years that I worked, I would go to work, everything [was] set up for me, the program and everything is there. And I just do my work. Well with COVID we worked from home, and I had to get all that set up in my home. So that was very stressful for me because it was just overwhelming because I'd never, ever had to do that. Now I can do it very easily. Set everything up, my workstation, my two monitors, because we had to do it so many times because we'd work in the office for part of the time and then we'd come back home and work part of the time. So, I think I'm definitely getting better, and I definitely will try to do more Googling and try to figure things out, even in the workplace. If I don't know how to do something in Excel, instead of asking somebody I'll try to do a search and try to figure it out. So definitely I think I'm progressing, but I'm still not great (B-14, woman).* |
| Ageism as prejudice and stereotypes, but not so much discrimination | * Ageism based on perceived age   *I don't think I've ever been discriminated against because of my age, but I'm not in any way, shape or form infirm. So, it makes it, there's nothing about me that would seem feeble or easy to intimidate. Um, which I think is probably a factor (B-10, woman).* |
| * Ageism through exclusion   *With people who are younger than me and, and, um, uh, it's not that it's meant to be hurtful towards me, but it's just this exclusion, […] like you don't understand, you're not part of this. You're not part of us without saying it, you know. Either physically, i.e., being in a room and having someone walk in and see me and walkout, um, having, making the opinion, and having it not listened to, or not acknowledged, or, you know, just enough that I can't really say anything or do anything about it, but just enough to know that no one cares what you think. No one cares what you have to say. Just, you know. Do what you're supposed to do and then leave us alone […] and it's not meant to be hurtful, unfortunately […] it's happening because it's accepted as not being hurtful [… or] toxic (B-07, man).* |
| * Ageism is perpetuated by social norms   *My understanding of a Cougar is a middle-aged woman in her forties and fifties, probably who dresses probably in a way that is, not conservative […] big hair, lots of makeup, bright lipstick, loud clothes, leopard prints, those kinds of things. That's a very over characterized, um, Cougar looking for men, looking for attention, looking for love, those kinds of things. A little bit desperate. [...] Um, it can be used even just for some women, if they go to a restaurant and there's a number of them and they're in their forties and they're all sitting together, um, and they're looking nice. It doesn't even have to be too sexualized or too flashy, but dressed to impress or, you know, makeup and all those kinds of things are given attention to […] because they are out perceivably without men, or maybe looking for men (B-06, woman).* |
| * Ageism in the media and broader society   *Well, there are times where I've had to challenge it […] I came across a Facebook meme once where, you know, it said something like, I'm afraid to be in the room with a, uh, was it a 40 something year old, white male. [...]. Right, and I knew where that meme was coming from and the person that produced it [a younger female friend]. I sat down and said from my point of view, I've done nothing wrong, to judge me based on my skin color and my age, and to see that I'm dangerous because of that. [...]. And it was respectful, and it was an open conversation, but it was a hard one. It's not something I was comfortable doing (B-07, man).* |
| * Ageism in educational and occupational spaces   *This is kind of heartbreaking. And she goes, ‘I'm so sorry. We somehow... your application somehow got caught in the cracks. We missed the fact that you had so many extra nursing credits. More than any other student we've ever had applied to come to Polytech to get their nursing degree. But there was no written up policy that would push you to the top. […] for the mature applicants. (B-04, woman).*  *You bed shitters should just go home (laughs). We called old guys my whole career (as firefighter) is a bed shitter. And then all the sudden you’re a bed shitter. I don’t know where the term come from but that’s exactly what I thought that you should just retire but there’s a culture on that. Like, okay, well you're old enough to retire, you should (B-08, man).* |
| * Ageism in health and fitness spaces   *But with my body aging, like I broke my hip last year, so you're right. I just had a slip and fall in the winter and then, you know, you're in the hospital and then it's like, oh, you're young. You're going to get over this. […] In the medical field I'm referred to as that age right because they're going to see all my body's going to respond to the therapy. (B-01, woman).*  *What I see, and this is actually in social media […] It absolutely pisses me off when I read an article and it's about, oh, gentle exercises for middle age people over 50. I'm like, yeah. I'm 54. I do CrossFit. I'm not in a wheelchair for crying out loud so the media's perception of what middle age looks like pretty much has me and a perm with a blue ranch sitting in a rocking chair. It's like […] maybe 30, 40, 50 years ago that might've been the case, but the advances in our knowledge of medication, self-help accessing resources. […] I don't feel myself being middle-aged at the age I am. (B-11, woman).* |
| * Ageism within the family   *And my hair is down there down to my waist, kills my mother. She, if he goes anybody over 40 should have short hair, you know* (B-10, woman). |
| * Impacts of ageism   *It was going on for a while and I sort of ignored it and thought it wasn’t happening or just ignored it basically. And, um, you know, I just found my work I was always double-checking things or if she'd send me an email, I'd be on guard that she would be upset with me for whatever reason. And yes, I found besides the sleep, I think I was kind of a nervous wreck at times. She just made me feel that way and not confident in my abilities when I never had any issues at work in the past 25 years […] So, I think she really did something to my self-esteem, and it was the best day of my life when she decided to part ways. […] I have another person in there now that's taken her place and she's just empathetic and kind, and we just don't have any issues and there shouldn't have been issues like that in the first place. (B-14, woman)* |
| Addressing ageism is multifaceted | * Age-inclusivity is welcoming of all ages   *Well, age inclusivity means regardless of age, you would have included a person. So, you have a group. And whether it doesn't matter if that person's 12, or if they're 60, even if the majority of you are 45, are you going to include them? And if you don't, why aren't you going to include them? (B-13, woman).* |
| * Anti-ageism is taking away preconceived ideas of age   *Anti would be against ageism, with respect to not having preconceived notions about whether, for instance, a person who's mature would be a good option as a candidate for a position or somebody that would be responsible. There wouldn't be those assumptions made that just because this person's old, they wouldn't have much to contribute. (B-04, woman).* |
| * Resilience is perseverance in the face of struggle   *Resilience, um, being okay with being uncomfortable with something and working through that discomfort and really asking yourself why do I feel discomfort and coming through the other side of that and still succeeding […] Some days are garbage, […] and you have to acknowledge it and let yourself feel whatever that is, and then take from it and move forward. Uh, being able to have open and honest conversations with people. That if somebody says something […] that took you off guard that you're okay in having a conversation like, Hey, I'm not quite sure what was intended by this […] help me understand. There’re good ways to have constructive dialogue with people. (B-11, woman).* |
| * Collective resistance against ageism and other ‘-isms’   *I was at a hairdresser years ago and, um, I had gone to her a couple of times before, and then that particular day I was there, and they had another client in a chair beside me. And, um, we weren't talking but the people beside us, we're talking about wild meat. And the lady had said, um, the girl, the lady getting her hair done said that she had, um, tried rabbit over the weekend or something like that. And, um, my hairdresser just looked at my reflection in the mirror. And she said, oh, well, you must eat that all the time. And I was like what? And I just know, actually I've, I don't think I've even had wild rabbit before. And I was shocked that she jumped to, first of all, um, she jumped to the fact that I was First Nation or Indigenous or, and then jumped to the fact that that must be like, just something I eat all the time, is wild rabbit. (B-21, woman).* |
| * Awareness campaigns and intergenerational contact   *Um, you know, when I say appearance, I mean, there's advertisements out there about how to stay young […] that's all ageism to me. And so, I'm wondering how that can be eradicated. And so, I think books need to be written. I think we need to get more interviews out there in the media, talking about it. (B-01, woman).* |