

What A Female Mid-Life Crisis Looks Like: Working Women Experience a Different Mid-Life Crisis Than Men.

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Forty years ago, a generation of women entered the workforce with unprecedented choices and few models for guidance. Now that these women have reached mid-life and those behind them are just entering this phase, we can begin to define what a "mid-life crisis of identity" looks like for women with careers.

In the past, the major shift in identity that women faced was the transition from mother to freedom.

Now the career-minded woman's life path more closely resemble a man's, shifting aspirations with the turn of each decade of their lives. Yet the reasons for the shifts differ for women.

Women now enter the workplace with high expectations of career advancement. Many in their 20's say, "I want to be CEO" then face the reality of having to live in the trenches for a while before they can rise up.

As they enter their 30's and their career focus narrows, they seek meaningful and challenging work, saying, "I want to prove my value and make a significant difference." This is where their development splits off from men. As they cope with the ongoing inequality in the workplace, their disappointments of dreams unmet, and continually feeling misunderstood and mismanaged, they begin to drop off the corporate ladder. Their personal values and corporate values may become irreconcilable.²

By the time they enter their 40's, many lose their taste for proving themselves. I have met many top performers who feel they can accomplish more working on their own or with a group of enlightened consultants/coaches. Others take lateral moves to keep their minds challenged and their lives in balance. Some drop off the grid to discover themselves.

A woman from my research went from being a celebrated marine biologist to an international sales executive to a management consultant and is currently raising her daughter and contemplating her next career move. She told me she was taught to always raise her hand. Now in her 40's, she is questioning what she is raising her hand for.

These women have not faced a crisis, but they are facing a mid-life quest for identity.

This quest might even endure into their 50's and 60's as circumstances change and desires surface.

It is possible that women without careers go through significant explorations each decade as well. However, self-sufficient women fall down a deeper rabbit hole. Mirroring Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, these women feel the muscle of meeting their needs of safety, sustainability and status on their own. And since the 1960's, many of these women grew up with the message, "You can accomplish anything." This all adds up to a restless craving to realize their potential.

For smart, goal-driven women, a mid-life crisis isn't about recovering lost youth. It's about discovering the application of their greatness. The problem is that no one has defined what "greatness" looks like so the quest has no specific destination.

Having the goal of "being great" is as hard to define as it is to achieve. There is always "the next great thing" to master, which may leave them feeling incomplete. I have come to call this phenomenon the "Burden of Greatness."

If you are questioning what is next for your career and possibly, your life, this is a great time to talk to friends who might be going through a similar experience. One of the worst things busy women do is put their friendships on the back burner. There is no need to "tough it out on your own." Find a friend who is also

interested in personal development who won't judge the struggle you are experiencing. A good coach can help as well.

Here are some questions you might explore together:

What do I feel I should have done by this time in my life?

Is there something more important and fulfilling that I can focus on now?

What do I want more of in my life? What have I imprisoned that is crying to be free?

How can I ensure my commitment to living a significant life?

Above all, don't let people tell you that you have no right to be unhappy with your life. It is okay to lose your equilibrium when others think your life should be smooth sailing. It is okay to question your life's purpose. It's okay to say, "I don't know who I am." It is better to ask the questions and seek the answers than to live a numb life.

Sometimes you have to lose yourself to find yourself. Some call this a mid-life crisis; I call it the Heroine's Journey.