3-1-1993

The Inner Voice of Aging

Erdice J. Yearley
University of Nebraska at Omaha

THE INNER VOICE OF AGING

A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF GERONTOLOGY

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

AND THE

FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

BY

ERDICE J. YEARLEY

MARCH 1993

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Thesis Acceptance

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Gerontology, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

Name	Department
Patricia Kolasa	Teacher Education
Bruce J. Horacek	Gerontology

James A. Thorson, Ed.D.
Chairman

March 5, 1993
Date

ABSTRACT

THE INNER VOICE OF AGING

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

This study investigated what gives older persons meaning in their lives and the role of spirituality in that meaning. The study focused on the direction of their lives, the sense of purpose in life, both from a formal religious belief and from the sense of ideals held by the individual. The study utilized qualitative methods. The ten subjects were selected from referral by others interviewed and by people met during the course of the last two years. Those interviewed ranged in age from 65 to 92 years; two were male; nine were Caucasian, and most were middle class.

Only three of the ten interviewed were comparatively healthy, but all have purpose to their lives. For most, that purpose is to help others or family or to be actively engaged in causes and issues. Most of them lead full, happy lives. In very unique ways, all expressed the importance of some type of spirituality (not necessarily church-centered), and were aware of God or a higher being, often basing their life philosophy on devotion to that higher being. The themes of their lives were, for the most part, family, the manner in which they had faced and borne early life and late life losses, life-long learning, being active, companionship, spirituality and religion, volunteerism, and active advocacy.

This study found older age, in spite of physical failings, to be a positive time. The majority of the group were vitally engaged in everyday living. They embraced the losses and suffering in their lives to form spiritual meaning in their final years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER II	
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	11
OLD AGE AND THE CYCLE OF LIFE	
Robert Butler - Life Review and Reminiscence	12
Sharon Kaufman - Identity in Old Age	14
Maas and Kuypers - The Adult Life Course	16
THE MEANING OF LIFE	
Erik Erikson - The Life Cycle Completed	18
Erik Erikson, Joan Erikson and Helen Kivnick - Life' Final Stages	20
Abraham Maslow - Transcendence	22
CONCEPTS OF MEANING	
Yalom - The Need for Meaning	24
Jung - Meaning and Spirituality	27
Frankl - Meaning and Suffering	28
CHAPTER III	
METHODS AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY	
Statement of the Problem	32
Purpose of the Study	32
Significance of the Study	33
The Design of Grounded Research	33
Identification of Terms	35
Participants	37
CHAPTER IV	
RESULTS	
The Qualitative Interview	38
Results of the Study of the Qualitative Interviews	42
Sources of Meaning	
Family	44
Spirituality	50
Religion and Religiosity	54
Service to Others	57
Learning	59
State of Current Health	60
Losses	62
Conclusions	66
The Shrine	76

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Qualitative Results 78
Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research 80

REFERENCES 83

APPENDIX

The Qualitative Interview Guide 88

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Finding meaning in life is commonly assumed to be a primary drive throughout the life span. The quest for meaning and direction may be increasingly important as one grows older (Kimble, 1990). Religion and spirituality might be seen to be vital pathways to the search, yet little has been done to study the religious world of the aging person as it relates to a quest for meaning (Fecher, 1982).

Denominations have displayed increased interest in their older members in the area of church attendance (Moberg, 1965) and involvement in church activities (Bianchi, 1986). Some studies have measured declines in church attendance in old age (Moberg, 1965; Payne, 1981), and a few studies included questions on personal observations and beliefs (Mindel & Vaughan, 1978; Young & Dowling, 1987). But, "while there does appear to be heightened interest in religion among older persons, the conclusions of these studies remain ambiguous and somewhat external.", and may have "little or no relationship to spiritual depths" (Bianchi, 1986, p.136-137). The basis for knowledge concerning spirituality, religiosity and aging has been from research that utilized religion and spirituality as part of a larger study (Payne, 1990). Research is needed that is designed to study how religion, religiosity and spirituality are integrated in later life, and to discover

and to determine the intrinsic religiousness and spirituality in older persons.

Few studies have questioned the older people themselves as to the ways they find to create meaning throughout their lives. Some key questions need answers. Are spirituality and religiosity a vital part of that meaning? What is the personal meaning of religion and spirituality to the older person? What different pathways do people use in their spiritual journeys? How do their own beliefs and practices vary from their "church"?

Thoughts of one's aging self and the process of aging in general come into every person's consciousness. Aging is usually considered to be negative and problem-filled, rather than a stage of development or growth. The tendency in most gerontological research has been to examine specific variables and to fail to document or account for individual experiences (Cole & Gadow, 1986). Each person's story, however, is important. As Jung (1965) maintained, there is a need for mythic statements: a view of the world that explains the meaning of human existence in a cosmic sense. He said that meaning may perhaps make everything endurable, but that "myth is revelation of a divine life in man"...."For it is not that 'God' is a myth" (p. 340). The story (myth) is the person's most precious possession. And, Campbell (1988) stated that life needs to signify and touch the eternal, to understand and view the mysterious and find

out who we are.

The spiritual dimension of a person has not been studied to the degree that other aspects of the human experience have been researched. Many studies have dealt with how the older person adapts to life and deals with mental health issues. There also is extensive research on the meaning of life, how an individual experiences his or her life as meaningful and the nature of that experience. But few of these studies concern the older person in particular. To come to a fuller understanding of development in later life, the spiritual dimension must be explored. This present study attempts to explore the aging person's life meaning and spirituality through in-depth interviews with a small sample of older respondents.

Why study the meaning of life for the older person? Because, over the life span of many decades, individuals accumulate particular meanings influencing what they find to be meaningful. In investigating a personal life course and how meaning has been assimilated throughout that life course, we can broaden the knowledge of life span development and personal adaptation (Moody, 1986). Carson (1986) calls the search for the meaning of growing old and being old an urgent search--to discover what is desirable and liveable in old age. He says the old people themselves are the best source for answers.

Kaufman (1986) investigated culture and identity in old

age and the meaning of being old, using a qualitative method. She studied, through interviews and life stories the relationship between old age, personal reflection and one's identity. While spirituality and religion were not the primary focus of her study, she found thoughtful and reflective answers to personal identity and discovered, in a selected group, what it was in their lives that gave each person meaning. She found, in her study, meaning in being old. In a sense the present study will go beyond that. It will seek to find what gives the older person meaning in a spiritual context.

The objective of the present study was to discover and to generate a theoretical construct of the inter-relationships of meaning of life, spirituality and religious belief. It was based on the perspectives of older people who have been interviewed in depth and utilized a sequence of questions based upon a life reviewing technique to discern insight into values and themes occurring during their lifetimes.

The methodology utilized the constant comparative method advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) systematically exploring the unknown by way of a qualitative approach. Extensive field notes and personal observations were added, as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1984). The collected data in the recorded interviews was analyzed. The answers were examined to discern the themes of their lives, their values,

and the meaning of the their lives, and the events therein as seen and understood by them. This strategy should find categories that are conceptually rich from which to develop theories. If the study of this group is meaningful, the findings should generate recommendations for further research to modify and verify theories postulated.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Allport (1950) viewed people as being religious in different ways, first identifying them as institutionalized and interiorized, later substituting the terms extrinsic and intrinsic. The extrinsic was characteristic of someone who was disposed to use religion for his own ends: as a means to other ends like security and solace and status. The person who was intrinsically oriented saw religion as an end in itself. Other researchers have added a further dimension to being religious: religion as a quest for meaning in the personal and social world (Darley & Batson, 1973, cited in Wulff, 1991). The intrinsic person was characterized as doctrinally orthodox; the "questor" was one for whom religion was an ongoing search.

In a discussion of the potentials of elderhood, Bianchi (1986) referred to the remarkable manner in which older individuals cope creatively with the limitations and the sufferings of declining health. He says the drawbacks of old age can be turned into thresholds for spiritual growth and meaningful contributions to society.

Investigations and empirical research in religion and old age examine religious conduct and/or tenets construed in traditional, narrow directions. But, church involvement may decline as people grow older with inner religious feelings remaining strong. Moberg (1967) studied spirituality

utilizing five dimensions of religiousity: experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual and consequential. These writings, however, tend to compartmentalize religiousness in an effort to distinguish it from other areas of life. Bianchi (1986) warned of the pigeon-holing of religion, the danger of amorphous blending, if religiousness becomes indistinguishable from other areas of life. He said the traditional studies on religion and aging were too confining. To search for and to examine inner spirituality, one has to go beyond the traditional to the very heart of individual existence, confronting the "boundaries of life and death, to grapple with hope and despair..." (Bianchi, 1986, p. 177).

OLD AGE AND THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Robert Butler: Life Review and Reminiscence

Butler (1963) recognizes the importance of the life history or life review and the need for reminiscence in the aged as a normal process of reviewing one's life as death approaches: the return to the conscious level of past experiences, especially the need to look again at unresolved conflicts, and to reintegrate them. With successful reintegration can come new meaning to a person's life and help in preparation for death by the alleviation of fear and apprehension.

The encouragement of deeper self awareness does not mean that one has no regrets or disappointments, but is rather a process of "unfolding" in which unresolved conflicts are reexamined. The older person may not even be aware of the process. The result of the life review, as Butler (1963) sees it, is coming to terms with what life has meant and what it can mean. The life review can enhance the elder's ability to face the present and deal with the future. Introspection may be a lifelong process, going on at some level of awareness all the time, especially at times of transition or crisis, such as death and marriage or renewed awareness of one's mortality. The process in later life helps to resolve conflicts and make life meaningful.

Butler did caution that life reviewing could cause a person to experience a painful sense of regret if life was perceived to have been a total waste (Butler & Lewis, 1982). But, the positive results of a life review could include righting old wrongs, a sense of serenity and pride in accomplishments and a feeling of having done one's best (Butler, 1963). It can lead to a reintegration of personality and can be psychotherapeutic, in that the person can understand his or her present circumstances and decide what to do in the time left.

According to Butler (1975), the desire to leave a trace or mark of self may result in older adults being more interested in posterity, history and the writing of memoirs.

He labelled these attempts to transcend mortality as historicity: "a search for identity beyond the grave" (p. 123).

Both Butler's life review and Erikson's final stage of integrity versus despair (1982) are important themes in studying reminiscence in aging and in the aged themselves. In addition to one's past history as important to self integrity, so may the future self find the survival of the self beyond death and the preserving of one's sense of self in immortality and generational history (Erikson et al. 1986).

Sharon Kaufman: Meaning and Identity in Old age

In 1980, Kaufman studied 60 white, urban, middle class Californians over age seventy. These were people she had met over a two-year period through personal and professional referrals and visits to nursing homes, senior centers and support groups. Not all were in good health, but they were mentally alert and articulate. Utilizing the specific techniques of the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Straus (1967), she chose a subsample of fifteen people for intensive, systematic interviewing to elicit a life story from them. This subgroup she utilized for her dissertation.

Her goal was to study aging "through the expression of individual humanity" (p. 6), and to investigate the manner in which elderly people integrate and accept the diversity

of lifetime experiences, as they came to the final stage of development, by investigating individual experience rather than the investigation of specific research variables. She studied aging from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology and social gerontology, to explore the meaning of aging among the elderly as emerging from their personal reflections on growing old using Erikson's developmental theory and a life story technique.

She studied the themes emerging from the life stories of the individuals: the manner in which the people evaluated and interpreted their experiences and how those experiences shaped their self-concept. These themes helped their perceptions as to who they are and how they participate and connect with others around them. She found that the self uses the past to create meaning in the present. She extracted the values in each person's life, finding that "living in a certain society at a particular time" (Kaufman 1986, p. 77), was a commonality. She did not find religion (as a structural factor) a commonly held source of meaning for them, although "it does emerge as a theme for several study participants" (p. 100). "Religion, though, incorporated into themes by a few people, is not directly a source of meaning for most" (p. 87). Yet, she did find these sources of meaning: daily productivity and activity, family relationships, friendships, education, mobility, socioeconomic status and religion. One of the

participants whose theme was religious she labelled extreme.

Maas and Kuypers: The Adult Life Course

The longitudinal study of Maas and Kuypers (1974) at Berkeley was performed to find answers to questions about human development and the social conditions that foster the optimal growth of the person. They wanted to understand, "how later and earlier phases of the adult life course are related to each other, how the contexts of old age and early childhood influence the ways in which people live and the persons they become and the extent to which personality and life style in old age are separate or interdependent aspects of aging processes" (Maas & Kuypers, 1974, p. x).

They utilized the records from the Guidance Study and the Berkeley Growth Study, both longitudinal studies begun in the late 1920s at the University of California at Berkeley. They reexamined the records forty years later and revisited and retested 142 parents of the original research subjects: 95 women, 476 men, then ranging in age from 60 to 82. Eliminated from the study were the very few widowers, since marital status was a factor. Forty-seven couples had remained married more than forty years. Two-thirds of the 95 women were married; one-third divorced (5) or widowed (28). Their health was assessed as above normal for their age and they were well off financially. They were interviewed in their homes and a thirty-seven page interview

was developed, with twelve sections: "arenas" of living; a recreational-activity check list, a concentric circle diagram; a self-rating of persons important to them and a shortened Anomie Questionnaire. And, every third parent received a "typical week's diary" and a life review.

Their main findings showed the diversity and uniqueness among the aging parents. They found consistencies, continuities and change over the life course and sex differences in the influence of contexts upon life styles. There was disengagement and they were able to perceive what patterns of association and non-association tell about aging. They identified ten different life styles with seven personality groupings. Most of these aging parents showed no evidence of travelling a downhill course. In old age most were involved in rewarding and diversely patterned lives, with high levels of coping capacities. The public attitudes about "old age" had no basis in reality. In old age, there was a continuing of what had been begun in earlier years. For example, if the woman's interests were balanced in a variety of areas and not focused solely on children and family, she was less apt to lose focus when the children left or the husband was gone. Evidence supported the women expanding their interests and involvement beyond the family. The researchers anticipated finding retirement to be a problem for men, but, instead, the men's life styles seemed unaffected by whether or not they were working. The

men's interests in multiple areas provided balance that lessened the sense of loss in any one area. A similar balance was found with mothers. Continuities in personality, from early adulthood to old age, were seen more among mothers than among the fathers. But, even when the time of young adulthood was narrowly lived or painfully overburdened, later years could offer new opportunities because there were repeated findings that "old age can provide a second and better chance at life" (p. 215). For the majority, there was involvement in rewarding but diversely patterned lives. Most had strong coping skills. For the few who had problems, old age seemed to find them at odds with themselves and others throughout their lives. "Old age merely continues for them what earlier years have launched" (Maas & Kuypers, 1974, p. 215).

THE MEANING OF LIFE

Erik Erikson: The life cycle completed

Erikson (1963, 1982), saw the critical issue for the development of ego integrity as the experiencing of one's life as meaningful. He viewed the theme of generativity to be the most important, with the heart of generativity the establishment of and the guidance of the next generation, whether it be the rearing of one's own offspring or generalized productivity and creativity. Self-absorbed

individuals were likely to be personally impoverished, experiencing a deep felt sense of stagnation. Integrity implied both coherence and wholeness: an emotional synthesis of other ego qualities in their most mature forms (Wulff, 1991). A life of integrity gives a quality of closure with a sense of world order and spiritual meaning. Those unable to accept as ultimate the life cycle drawing to a close, he said, were given to despair, approaching death with fear and disgust (Erikson, 1982).

Personality development as seen by Erikson was a continuing process through adulthood. He described the eight stages of life as producing the necessary strength for involvement in society from birth to late adulthood: infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and old age. Each of these stages had two contrary dispositions: infancy--basic trust/mistrust; early childhood--autonomy/shame and doubt; play age--initiative/guilt; school age--industry/inferiority; adolescence--ego identity/role confusion; young adulthood--intimacy/ isolation; adulthood--generativity/stagnation and old age--integrity/despair. He believed that a person's vital involvement depended on the capacity to balance the dispositions at each stage. The product of the balance, that is, the virtue emerging or the strength of each stage was hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care and wisdom (Erikson, 1963, 1982, 1985,

& 1986).

In 1982, Erikson focused on epigenetic development in aging, by which he meant growth and development that followed analogous patterns and did not represent a mere succession. It determined certain laws involving the fundamental relationship of growing parts to one another. He spoke of stages of prolonged human childhood and how the interaction of built-in potential for serving one another is a part of the evolutionary development. He saw the need for old people to maintain a grand-generative function--a sense of family, without which the person lacks the vital involvement for staying really alive. He believed that integrity could help bind things together when the aged become again like little children.

Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick: Life's Final Stages

Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986) developed a study to try to understand the psychosocial process of vital involvement in later life. Twenty-nine octogenarians whose life-historical data had been collected over a period of fifty years were interviewed. Data in a longitudinal study followed the lives of a large number of children born in Berkeley in 1928 and part of 1929. The purpose of the study was to utilize the eight stages of development to examine "the remaining or new potentials of the last interactions and the vital (if paradoxical) involvement in the necessary

disinvolvements of old age" (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 33). Each person was interviewed several times, asking open-ended questions, with the first interview asking about familial and personal history. In later interviews, information was gathered relating to each psycho-social theme as they applied to the person's life experiences. The findings displayed the persons' reflections on their lives.

In the last theme, integrity versus despair, the people interviewed were found to have anticipated life in old age through relationships with grandparents and other old people they admired as guides to successful aging. To strive towards those qualities gave them the ability and strength to counterbalance the uncertainty of how to behave in old age and preparations for what might come next. Most people in the study counterbalanced feelings of depression and deterioration with feelings of optimistic and life-affirming involvement.

They found many turning to religion "to current beliefs and to those of a lifetime" (Erikson et al., 1986, p. 69). And, lifelong religious faith offered them consolation. For some, invoking the religious expressions of childhood was a source of religious strength and integration when faced with despair--an inevitability. Some spoke of the importance of going to church, whether or not they actually could attend, a possible reflection of a sense of integrity in their lives, in generational and community cycles. They spoke of

the tension between basic trust and mistrust, reaching back to early life cycles, a tension that involves "issues of commitment to established religion and with increasing age, of quasi-religious, philosophical considerations" so that, in the final stage, "some rudimentary hope has blossomed into a mature faith in being that is closely related to essential wisdom" (p. 22). Many tried to express what they meant when they affirmed belief in a personal God, a higher being, or the grand plan of the universe. These meanings were widely varied, depending on their own unique lifetime experiences.

All those in the study were involved in a process of attempting to reexperience the psychosocial themes of a lifetime whether they seemed to be successful or not and were trying to bring lifelong weaknesses into balance with their strengths.

ABRAHAM MASLOW: Transcendence

Science, said Maslow, was the religion of the nonreligious, a source of deeply rewarding experience (Maslow, 1966). But, he searched for good human beings (GHBs) to understand the positive side of human potential among students, saints, great persons and heroes. His final sample consisted of 18 mostly male figures, using data that consisted of intuitive global impressions.

In his hierarchy of needs (holistic-dynamic theory), he

proposed that humans are universally endowed with certain vaguely delineated needs, five in number. The first four, the physiological, safety, belongingness and love needs, and esteem needs, are considered the lower or deficiency needs, because they are actuated by a needed object. The higher or growth needs form the fifth level: that of self-actualization. Ordinarily, self-actualization appears only after the satisfaction of the other four needs, when humans desire to actualize their potentials and attain fuller knowledge of their nature. The four deficiency needs subside when they are satisfied; growth needs intensify when gratified. The growth is in itself rewarding and impels the person to ever-higher levels of attainment (Maslow, 1968, 1970).

Maslow found that the rare, healthy and usually older persons whom he termed self-actualized showed individual differences, but resembled one another in significant areas such as more accurate perception and acceptance of reality, spontaneity, fresh appreciation, creativeness, deeper, more satisfying interpersonal relations, non-hostile philosophical humor, and they applied consistently clear moral and ethical standards. He found them commonly having mystical experiences: peak experiences marked by feelings of wholeness and integration of fully existing in the here and now. These experiences contribute to the feeling that life is truly worth living (Maslow, 1968). He said peak

experiences might lead to an enduring phenomenon called a high-plateau experience consisting of a continuing sense of illumination: of perceiving the miraculous in ordinary things. Those experiencing the high-plateau experience in a deep and lasting way were more likely to report their lives as very meaningful: they thought a good deal about the purpose of life; spent time meditating about their lives, and were more apt to be self-assured. Those who reported experiencing contact with the sacred were more likely to feel they knew the purpose of life.

Like Jung, Maslow saw in religion both positive and negative functions. As an intense personal experience, he felt religion should be cherished and fostered as an aspect of self-actualization. But, he felt that religion, as an orthodox and as a pious habit, was associated with lower levels of the hierarchy.

CONCEPTS OF MEANING

IRVIN YALOM: The Need for Meaning

"Is there any meaning in my life which will not be destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me?" (Tolstoy, 1929, p. 12). "The question of life's meaning is the most urgent question of all" (Camus, as cited in Yalom, 1980). Yalom addressed the loss of meaning in our changing culture, asserting that today's malady is meaninglessness and that

the religious world view of yesteryear supplied the answer that was so comprehensive that the question of meaning was obscured. He felt that people in the past generations were so occupied with meeting basic survival needs they had no time to examine their need for meaning. Perhaps, too, few of them lived into their later years, when they might have had the time to examine meaning. Meaninglessness comes with disengagement and leisure; if one is involved in surviving, the issue of meaninglessness does not arise (Yalom, 1980). Yalom cited the use of the Life Regard Index of Battista and Almond (1973), in which they explored the relationship between self-esteem and life-regard (meaning in life). They found that it was possible for a person with high self-esteem to have low meaning in life. This in part corroborates Erikson (1983)--that one must solve the task of establishing self-worth and personal identity before one could develop a sense of life meaning. Their empirical research showed that there was an association between a positive sense of meaning in life and deeply-held religious beliefs, self-transcendent values, group membership, dedication to some cause and the adoption of clear life goals. Life meaning changed over the life of an individual and life meaning must be viewed in a developmental perspective, that is, "other development tasks must precede development of Meaning" (Yalom, 1980, p. 460).

Yalom found meaning of life and meaning of **my** life to

have different answers. The meaning of life was an inquiry into cosmic meaning, about life in general, i.e., does human life fit into a coherent universal pattern? The meaning of **my** life is different and refers to a terrestrial meaning which embraces purpose, i.e., if you possess a sense of meaning you experience life as having a purpose to be fulfilled--some goal or goals to seek and attain. And thus, a person with a personal sense of meaning might not have a cosmic meaning system.

He addressed meaninglessness, finding that almost all of his patients expressed concern for the lack of meaning in their lives. He spoke of the existential vacuum that Frankl (1963) saw as a common phenomenon, characterized by a subjective state of boredom, apathy and emptiness, questioning the point of most of the activities of life. In Love's Executioner (1989), Yalom says, "each of us subscribes...to the belief that existence consists of an eternal, upward spiral of achievement, dependent on will alone" (p. 139), but that this comforting illusion may be shattered by a "boundary experience," an urgent irreversible experience, such as the imminence of our own death or that of a significant other, shattering the illusion of our invulnerability. But, he noted, those "who experience a sense of meaning in their lives appear to live more fully and to face death with less despair than those whose lives are devoid of meaning" (p. 432-433). "We apparently need

absolutes--firm ideals to which we can aspire and guidelines by which to steer our lives" (p. 422).

Yalom, then, saw a positive sense of meaning in life fulfilled in dedication to a cause, to self-actualization and to self-transcendent values associated with deeply held religious beliefs (Yalom, 1980).

CARL JUNG: Meaning and Spirituality

The cosmic meaning given by a religious world view permits many interpretations of an individual's life purpose. No psychologist of religion has influenced scholars more than Carl Jung. He saw religion as a necessary psychological function, and that if that aspect was neglected it was detrimental both to the individual and to society. Jung (1933) asserted man's personal purpose in life was to complete God's work of creation--that man was the second creator of the world. He saw the suffering of a soul as due to the soul not having discovered its meaning. Jung said: "Meaning makes a great many things endurable--perhaps everything" (Jung, as cited in Jaffe, Myth of Meaning, p. 146). He said meaninglessness inhibited the fullness of life and was the equivalent of illness (Jung, 1966). He viewed the neurotic person as one who had a sense of a religious void--an emptiness. He said his patients were those who in the second half of life were unable to find a religious outlook in life or had lost it.

Jung believed that human personality has a natural tendency toward unification and wholeness. Man needed, Jung said, to gain knowledge of his own intrinsic character, and that knowledge would grow only when he took into account all of human experience, including the experience of God. God, he said, was not a matter of belief, but of indisputable and valuable experience (Jung (1952a, 1938). In fact, his house in Kusnachat contains the following engraving: **Vocatus atque non vocatus deus adert--Summoned or not summoned, God will be present** (Wulf, 1991). According to Wulf, these words epitomize Jung's psychology of religion.

VICTOR FRANKL: Meaning and Suffering

Frankl, in the destructive environment of a Nazi concentration camp, found meaning in life to be the important force in survival and in living through suffering (1959). He underscored the importance of religious faith in sustaining mental and physical health among the prisoners. He suggested that religious belief can supply purpose and meaning and so affect one's entire satisfaction with existence. He found those able to retreat to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom from their sufferings were more likely to survive their ordeal. He said that spiritual freedom, which cannot be taken away, makes life meaningful and purposeful. He said "The salvation of man is through love and in love" (Frankl, 1959, p. 36.). And, "If

there is meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning to suffering" (p. 67). The meaning of life differs from person to person and from moment to moment. His logotherapeutic approach was based on striving to find a meaning in one's life as the primary motivational force (p. 97). He saw man's main concern to consist of fulfilling a meaning, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts. He spoke of an existential vacuum: a loss of the feeling that life is meaningful. In logotherapy, the meaning of life was discovered in three different ways: (1) doing a deed (2) experiencing a value and (3) by suffering. His theory, then, is that the behavior of a person is directly related to his or her search for meaning and to values espoused by that person. Frankl speaks of a need for a person to transcend his own self-interest to look for a cause or purpose beyond self to find meaning. Normal human existence is always directed not to the self but toward self-transcendence with the beacon of conscience as the guide. He found an unconscious logos, a "noological dimension" of spiritual depth, where the unconscious religiousness lies, inherent in all persons (Frankl, 1966, 1975). It is the result of the unconscious intrinsic religiousness that causes a sense of emptiness, meaninglessness and futility, with the task of the logotherapist to remind the patient of his or her personal spiritual core. However, he felt that

belief in God was not enough--there must be an awareness of the oneness of humankind (Frankl, 1959).

The ageless self is described as "ongoing, continuous, and creative." (Kaufman, 1986, p. 14). Kaufman found the elderly maintaining continuity in a creative process by deriving meaning from the past; constantly recreating and interpreting the past; utilizing the past as a resource for their present coherent being. Butler (1963) saw the life history review as a normal process in aging giving new meaning to a person's life with deeper self-awareness as a result of review of the past. Maas and Kuypers (1974) studied the relationship between earlier and later phases of the life course. They found diversity, uniqueness, change, continuity and sex differences, but no evidence of a downhill life course. Erikson (1963, 1982) believed that ego integrity developed in the experience of finding meaning in life. He said integrity gave spiritual meaning to the end of life with the elderly having a sense of family, a grand-generative function, giving the older person the vital involvement for staying truly alive. Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986) discovered many elderly turning to lifelong religious beliefs for consolation and in childhood religious beliefs for consolation when they faced inevitable despair. Their beliefs were widely varied. Maslow (1986) sought to understand the positive side of human potential. He found individual differences in self-actualized individuals and

similarities in significant areas. To the self-actualized individual life was truly worth living. Yalom (1980) addressed the meaninglessness of today, seeing the religious world view of the past so comprehensive as to obscure the question of meaning. He, like Erikson, found an association between positive sources of meaning in life and deeply held religious beliefs. He differentiated between a cosmic and personal meaning of life. Jung discovered in his patients a religious void or the inability to find a religious outlook in life. Frankl (1959) said religious belief supplied purpose and meaning in suffering.

Studies of religion and spirituality in old-age have been too confining and traditional (Bianci, 1986). Instead, we must look at individual existence to view religion and spirituality as a part of the person's entire life-span. To do so requires further qualitative studies of the personal viewpoints of older persons, grounded in the story and the myth of their lives. There is need for further qualitative study into the process of how individuals integrate the diverse experiences of their lives and how spirituality and religion enter into that integration. This study attempts to discover the personal meaning of life and how religion and spirituality are expressed and felt in the personal viewpoints of the older person.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

The problem is how to gain knowledge about the spiritual and religious beliefs of older people and how those beliefs affect the meaning of life in older people. It will not suffice to expand existing theories of aging. It is important that researchers go to ground to learn first hand from the older people themselves.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to discover and to generate a theoretical construct of the meaning of life, spirituality and religious belief and an understanding of the causation and outcome of life events. It is based on the perspectives of older people interviewed informally, utilizing a sequence of questions and life review techniques to discern insight into values and themes occurring during their lifetimes. Of particular interest will be the way they view their lives and the meaning now of their lives. The interviewing approach is suggested by the grounded theory of Glaser and Straus (1967). This approach is especially suited to an area where there is little knowledge and unknown territory.

Significance of the Study

The result of this study should afford a greater understanding of older people and their inner philosophy and feelings. The study should generate hypotheses that lay the groundwork for future research, to confirm, deny or modify this research (Rowles & Reinharz, 1988).

The Design of Grounded Research

Grounded research is the use of qualitative methods to explore unknown areas. Qualitative gerontology is methodology used to describe behavioral patterns and interactive processes that discover the meanings and the values that exist in older peoples' experiences. It seeks patterns existing in the older person's world and a way to understand how those experiences exist in the persons themselves (Rowles & Reinharz, 1988).

The methodology utilizes the constant comparative method advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), systematically exploring the unknown by way of a qualitative approach. Extensive field notes and personal observations were taken as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The collected data in the recorded interviews was analyzed. The answers were examined to discern the themes of their lives, their values, and the meaning of their lives,and the events therein, as seen and understood by

them. This strategy should find categories that are conceptually rich from which to develop theories. If the study of this group is meaningful, the findings should generate recommendations for future research to modify and verify the theories postulated.

Data gathered by the researcher requires special collection processes to be certain the information will furnish the basis for meaning analyses and that it has special properties (Reinharz, 1984). It is gathered personally from the individuals selected with personal interactions, so the person doing the research can both hear and observe, face to face. This allows the researcher to discover what lies under the surface so he or she may attempt to identify the theoretically relevant within the complexity of an individual.

The researcher, in the comparative method of grounded research, develops categories, grounded in the facts found in the collected data. The categories are refined, discarded or merged to elicit more meaningful categories, until it is conceptually complete (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). As Lincoln and Guba (1984) point out, however, although there is no implied manipulation by the researcher, it is difficult to divest oneself of standardized thinking, because established paradigms are taken for granted. It is difficult to comprehend the possibility that there might be other ways of thinking about a problem. These categories

form the basis for the resulting hypotheses and the development of theory.

The limitations of this study include the scope of the interviews. In some instances, there was only one interview, covering questions that included a life review and chronology, with special emphasis on what religion, spirituality and life mean or have meant to the individual. Some limited follow-up interviews and additional transcriptions were necessary.

Identification of Terms

The terms used in this study are generally broad but may vary, depending on the theoretical framework or practical context. What follows is a discussion and definition of the key terms.

Meaning and the search for meaning are notoriously vague concepts. Meaning has been studied by gerontologists in life span development psychology, in reminiscence and life review (Butler, 1963) and in moral development and kinship with religion and spiritual well being and the life course (LeFevre & LeFevre, 1985; Clements, 1981). Both terms refer to a coherence and wholeness (integrity). Erikson (1985) described meaning as an essential ingredient to understanding the process of aging. Jung (1969) said that meaning depended on the awareness of a spiritual reality complementing the empirical reality of life to form

a whole. "We human beings must enter our own webs of meaning in order to understand ourselves" (Cole, 1986, p. 4). Meaning, then, and a meaningful life refer to lived perceptions: a belief that one is fulfilling a framework or life goal that provides a highly valued understanding of life (Moody, 1986). It is possible that life in general may be meaningless but one's own life has meaning. Yalom (1980) concedes that possibility, but states: "One who possesses a sense of cosmic meaning {the meaning of life} generally experiences a corresponding sense of terrestrial meaning {the meaning of **my** life]....one's own terrestrial meaning consists of fulfilling or harmonizing with that cosmic meaning." (Yalom, 1980, p. 424). As Moody (1986) says, "the drive toward totality, the search for meaning, appears at a point when the task of life is about to be completed" p.16).

Spirituality is linked with religion, but is not synonymous with it, since the focus of most religions is the development and the nurturing of spiritual well-being for all members (Moberg, 1988). Spirituality goes far beyond the bounds of religion. As defined by the Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms (1988, p. 99), spirituality is the degree of involvement or state of awareness or devotion to a higher being or life philosophy, but not always related to conventional religious beliefs. Jung (1969) saw it as a thirst within for a wholeness, a union with God and a hunger for the unification of one's life, a conception for

existence (Allport, 1968). It is that aspect of one's religion or philosophy that is perceived as the noble and lofty full ideal of perfection (Allport, 1968).

Participants

The sample is neither random, nor specifically selective. The interviews will include contacts made personally within the last two years in Nebraska, Hawaii, and in Nashville, Tennessee. Individuals such as significant others or family were not interviewed. The people interviewed were told of the purpose of the interview, the nature of the questions, and that their anonymity would be assured.

The fourth chapter will view the results of the study, themes, values and observations. The fifth and final chapter will give conclusions, findings, hypotheses and implications for future research. An appendix will include questions utilized in the interview.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

When the first glimmering of an idea for this thesis emerged, the subjects were not immediately apparent. No specific pattern of selection was utilized, except that the opportunity to visit Hawaii on three separate occasions permitted the selection of subjects from that area.

The pilot interview was conducted with Paula, an 88 year-old woman met at a workshop for women, who turned out to be a personal friend of a friend. She was bright, articulate and lively. The interview was a learning experience, in that it continued for nearly five hours and a portion of it never was recorded because of ineptness with the recorder. And, it became apparent that the interviews needed a little more guidance to control their length. The pilot interview also underlined the need for more field notes on the part of the interviewer, since all of the interviews, with one exception, were completed in one sitting.

There were ten interviews, four in Hawaii, five in Lincoln, Nebraska and one in Nashville, Tennessee. The first interviewee, Nolan, was the resident volunteer tour guide/docent at a prominent tourist attraction not too far from Diamond Head on Oahu. He conducted tours of the area,

explaining the geographic and oceanographic sea life and its environs. His interview was an excellent beginning for the Hawaii interviews, and was followed up, in his case, with a subsequent, shorter interview at his home, facing the sea. This chance meeting with a volunteer tour guide led to a referral by him to a neighbor, who shortly after left the islands to return to the mainland, however, so was not interviewed.

An acquaintance in Kaneohe, on the windward side of the Island, referred me to the next interview, a retired nurse/teacher named Lore. She had suggested an interview of my acquaintance, who is in his 70s. She also gave the name of a friend of hers, Riki, who was still working at age 74. Of the four interviewees, two were from the windward side of the Island: Kaneohe, the other two were from the leeward side: Honolulu. Two men and two women were interviewed on the island. Riki was the only non-Caucasian interviewed.

All five Nebraska interviews were women, and all were people met in the past two years, with one exception: a neighbor whose history included the death of her spouse two years ago. The Nashville interview was an acquaintance of eight years whose past history was unknown.

Each was asked to participate in an interview lasting at least two hours. Eight of the interviews took place in the individual's home. One interview was recorded at Trippler Army Hospital in Honolulu, in the office of the

interviewee. The other interview was recorded in Kaneohe in my temporary residence, at the request of the interviewee. All of those interviewed reported a positive response from the experience. One said she felt like she had been to a very long and detailed "confession." Another said it made her feel good inside, and still another found herself taken back to memories deep within her. All responded positively to the experience and welcomed the chance to talk about meaningful experiences and events in their lives that they seldom, if ever, voiced.

The qualitative interview was chosen to investigate the sense of purpose in life and spirituality because of its appropriateness in securing kinds of information not obtainable by other measures. Such information as the individual's own idea of meaningfulness and unique experience in aging can be obtained in this manner. Neugarten (1973) spoke of the need for methods and investigations in which a small group of adults was studied in detail, with attention centered on subtle, intimate social interaction. She saw as especially valuable studies in which those interviewed gave "introspective accounts of the cognitive strategies they employ in dealing with inner and outer life events" (Neugarten, 1973, pp. 311-335). Kastenbaum (1973) wrote that gerontology was not being comprehensive unless methodology included the thoughts and feelings of the elderly. Individual experiences about old

age have been documented in personal journals, letters, autobiographies and poetry (Scott-Maxwell, 1968; Sarton, 1973).

The qualitative interview was used to secure information about the person's life, the social fiber of that life, how experience was recalled and interpreted and the meaning of that experience for him or her. The interview guideline was modeled after Kaufman, and its primary purpose was to try to discover the individual values and themes of the life of that person and how he or she found meaning through the personal life story.

The interview was partly structured, in that the interview guide was utilized to serve as a guideline for the direction of the interview to ensure fairly uniform coverage of topics, i. e. life events, review, present versus past events and familial history, and aging, spiritual and social identity (See Appendix). Most of the same questions were asked of each participant, but not necessarily in the same sequence, depending on the direction the conversation took.

The interviews lasted from one and a half hours to five hours in length; they were tape-recorded. In every case rapport was established and the participant was given a brief description of the content and the purpose of the interview.

Consent to participate in this study was obtained verbally from each individual who was interviewed prior to

the interview. Each participant was given a brief description of the study and told that their names would not be used, but that the information received would be analyzed for themes and values and utilized in this thesis. No written consent forms were secured, since anonymity was assured.

Results of the Study of the Qualitative Interviews

In examining the life stories of the ten people interviewed, the focus was on the interpretation and the organization of their personal experiences: the individual life, the social context of that life, how each person interpreted and recalled experiences, and the meaning of those experiences to each person. These recorded and transcribed interviews were viewed as literary texts to be examined and interpreted. Each verbatim transcript was read and dissected several times to derive the sources of meaning, the themes and the values as shown in their stories.

Each of the ten was approached with no preconceived ideas of what was significant and meaningful. Every attempt was made to avoid personal bias on the researcher's part, but, of course, theoretical constructs and data from previous studies reviewed were kept in mind, while seeking common and individual sources of meaning among the ten recorded conversations. Every attempt was made to preserve

the uniqueness and individuality of each person's story and convey the respondent's own interpretation of his or her life.

All of these individuals lived in a private home or apartment. Seven of them lived alone. Two were partially house-bound. One male lived with a spouse. One male lived with someone who was not his wife. One female lived with a son who worked. Each of these people wanted to have a place that was home and to live as independently as possible so they could choose to do the things they wanted to do with their lives as long as they could.

The marital/single status of the group varied. Two, both female, had never married, and both felt they chose their life work, rather than spouses. In fact, one of the two said she was married to her work: nursing. Four were widows, their husbands having died after marriages lasting 40 to 50 years. Two females had been divorced. One male had been married and divorced twice and was now living with a widow in a cooperative arrangement.

In examining the interviews, I found a number of life themes and sources of meaning. Service to others, being active, family relationships, friends, companionship, spirituality, religion, learning, losses, volunteerism and active advocacy were common themes. But, it should be noted that spirituality and religion are not categories or themes that can be completely separated. They overlap and

intermingle, as do family relationships and companionship. And, the themes of a positive outlook and attitude and current health concerns are not sources of meaning in themselves, but certainly influence the extent to which each of those interviewed could engage in activity and be productive.

The following results illustrate the sources of meaning expressed by the ten people who participated in the study. Their first names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Sources of Meaning

Family

The role of family was a source of meaning for all of the participants in the group, including those who never married. But, the family role is sometimes complex and unusual. Without family support or ties, two of the women said they would feel lost and, indeed, might be unable to function in their own homes. "Nolan" has little contact with his real children, but has, through the years, adopted his students and/or young friends as kin, figuratively. He regularly corresponds with old friends from years ago, and they visit him. His own children and grandchildren are heard from very rarely. He is living with a widow and has no plans to marry her, but he and she are extremely

compatible. He lives in her house and so is partially financially supported by her. For him, his children and grandchildren exist, but are not close. He does have a brother who visits him on an annual basis, and apparently his ties with his brother are stronger than those with children and grandchildren. The fact that he divorced the mother of his children years ago and remarried may very well account for what could be perceived as estrangement from his children.

"Lou" on the other hand is extremely close to her two daughters, who live in the same town, but professes to be dissatisfied with her only son: she perceives him as avoiding or shirking his duty to her since the death of her husband.

Children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, grand-nieces and nephews and/or sisters and brothers play major roles in providing meaning for all but one of those interviewed. Three of the women in the study were childless, two of them having never married and the third was widowed and has no children. But, these three were deeply interested in nieces and nephews and younger siblings, or regarded other younger friends as substitute children. The childless widow, Lottie, in Nashville, has a young gay man who serves as a surrogate child, often taking her on trips and helping her cope, when he is in town. Her only brother died several years ago, but she keeps in touch

with his widow, who lives in Chattanooga. She relies on close friends and former co-workers of many years for limited support since she no longer drives, having been disabled by a stroke, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and incontinence. Still pluckily using a 3-legged cane, she often entertains and goes out to dinner. A maid comes over several times a week to help maintain her lovely condominium. She views life with vigor and interest. Her friends are her family.

In a qualitative study by Alexander, Rubinstein, Goodman, and Luborsky (1992), the researchers described the regrets of late life in older women. They found that childlessness was viewed as an incomplete life, with the chain of life incomplete and a belief that isolation and vulnerability are mitigated through the potent connection with children. Yet Nolan, who had children and grandchildren, seemed to have little or no connection or dialogue with them. The two who never married have found their familial connection with other kin. And, neither of them expressed any regrets about not marrying, identifying with and staying in close contact with nieces and nephews.

Lou has lung cancer, but has always been sickly and misses her husband who was "going to take care of me, since I was the puny one." Two daughters live close and a son doesn't visit often enough, she says, regretfully, but the grandchildren provide her yardkeeping, as she sits alone,

with the radio playing softly 24 hours a day, "to fill the empty corners." She says: "I wake up depressed and I go to bed depressed," but, her telephone is her lifeline and she often talks to a widower cousin to cheer him up in his grief. She says her cousin "kept his grief in his pocket for years." She is an active geneology volunteer, by telephone, with some "geneology friends." The themes of her life are her family, friends, religion, and geneology, even though, by her own admission, she has been puny since birth.

Henry was the only married individual interviewed. He takes pride in his career accomplishments as a self-made man who travelled extensively in his work as a contractor, rebuilding tanks and battle equipment after WWII and taking part in refurbishing war equipment for the Chinese on Formosa. He lived in Taiwan and in Japan, in England and the West Bronx, in Detroit, Chicago, Korea and Guam. His marriage to his present wife, a Hawaii native, occurred some 47 years ago. Their three children, born after a childless ten years, all live in California, but he and his wife visit them often. The themes of his life are family, legislative issues for the elderly, and public service.

Cel is close to her only son, a businessman in San Francisco and to her two grandsons. She became a grandmother for the first time at 74. She is now 76. She also keeps in touch with several cousins. She has no

siblings. She cared for her mother, who lived to be 97, during the last 12 years of her mother's life and "hated every minute of it." She moved back to Nebraska from California to care for her parents. She says her mother was overbearing and a tyrant. Her life themes were family, including active caregiving of her parents in their final years, her friends and the battle with growing old and coping with her ailments.

Deidre has a close relationship with her three children and two remaining siblings who live in England. Her brother and sister maintain a trans-Atlantic relationship, and she visits them at least once a year and they reciprocate. Her daughter, who is divorced and lives in Lincoln, had been her caregiver when she was laid up with a severe back problem, and Deidre recently has had to care for her own daughter, who suffered a nervous breakdown and needed her mother's support desperately. The themes of her life are family, church, public service and volunteerism.

Paula, 89, has a sort of love-hate relationship with her two daughters who live in California and Chicago and who visit her once a year. She views them in much the same way her Mother viewed her: as extensions of herself, and whether they conform with her impression of the way they should have turned out determines her attitude toward them at a given time. She lives alone in a condominium in a retirement village geared for the middle-income elderly.

Her two daughters are important to her even though they live hundreds of miles away. She has a special granddaughter whom she will entrust with her finances, if she becomes unable to function. Her granddaughter has become someone that Paula admires: "a success." She has also "adopted" a younger friend who is 60, as surrogate daughter in part because the friend is a successful news reporter and "somebody." She still speaks, at length, of being afraid of her mother, a domineering woman. The biggest mistake of her life, she said, was getting married. She does get depressed and is driven and compulsive, by her own admission. "I keep wanting to do so many things that I didn't get to do years ago. I never had the time. I feel like I let an awful lot of potential go down the drain." Her philosophy of life is, "It's not a picnic, it's an experience. I wish to live long enough to be able to do a lot of things that I never could do when I was younger. I wish people didn't talk so much about years because I don't feel 88. Oh, maybe sometimes I do look 88....why do they put so much emphasis on years?" She is meticulous, likes housekeeping and cooking, enjoys that the most. She is a list-maker, with books upon books upon books of records. Since 1933, she has kept a record of every movie she has seen. And she has seen thousands. She feels she has a lot of inner energy--a nervous energy. Meaning in her life comes from social activities, including church groups, and self-learning, especially creative

writing and tourism.

When her husband died she felt like she was "let loose." "Freedom. I can do as I please and if somebody doesn't like it, to hell with them!" The hardest thing about growing older is you are the oldest one in a group, she says. The best thing about growing old is having experienced so many wonderful things.

Research by Young and Dowling (1987) found evidence that frequent interaction in a social network contributed to the spiritual well-being of older people, affirming the wholeness of their lives. The ten people I interviewed were, for the most part, socially active, and most of them were spiritually inclined. Young and Dowling's findings prompted them to ask whether networking with family and friends was a substitute for organized religiosity. There is no doubt that the devotion to family and friends is, in itself, spiritual, and adds meaning to the lives of the elderly.

Spirituality

Nine of the ten interviewees in the present study identified spirituality and/or religion as sources of meaning in their lives. But, in most of the interviews, it was difficult to elicit information, perhaps because it is such an inner part of all of us, or, perhaps, because, in the questioning, it is the final part of the interviews and

they are guided by the preceding questions, which do not necessarily lead directly into spirituality and religion.

Paula, when asked, "What does it mean to be spiritual?", said: "It means to find out that you can be by yourself and know that you can be by yourself and know that there is some energy, someone...some power, call it God, call it whatever you may, that is there somewhere guiding you, and I feel sometimes like I have been in situations where it is so embarrassing...for instance, if you lose something; you think, my God, how could I have been so foolish? So, stop and let go, let go and let God do it. And, I feel like if I can control myself inside...that is part of my spiritual being that is inside...And, I do that more all the time because I don't have my husband to tell it to."

Cel said she was "slightly" religious but not spiritual. "I don't know why...the meaning of religion was never stressed, like--ask God for help or things like that--never in our household." About God: "Well, I know He's there...I choose to believe that He is there. I can't cope with the idea...that He knows everything that is going on. I cannot. To me, He's more like a human being and no human being can conceive of everything that is going on in this world at the same time." To Cel, being spiritual means to have an inner feeling of faith which she feels she does not have. "To be religious means to believe that there is a

God, and that I am a good person...and that I have paid my dues and done my duty especially toward my parents." She believes the difference between spirituality and religiosity is "something inside. Spiritual is a deeper feeling." And, she says she is more spiritual and religious now than she was at 40 or 50, that it is a little deeper. "Maybe I believe more. Before, when I was younger you sort of took your religion for granted. You were a Catholic. I didn't think much about religion." But, later on she denied that she is spiritual.

Deidre, on the other hand, saw no difference between spirituality and religiousness. "I don't see any difference. You have to be true to yourself. If you are going to be religious you must have a spiritual feeling. I grew up with the feeling that the Holy Spirit lives within me." She prays every day, but, when asked if she prayed about her problem, she said she hadn't, because she was so full of self-pity. Yet, she says she does ask God to give her courage and strength.

Henry and his wife were married in a Catholic church in Hawaii, but gradually ceased attending church of any kind. It is no longer a part of their lives. He became disillusioned with the changes in the Catholic Church. He says "we are undiminished in belief in God and in what we should practice as a way of life. Although our church tells us why we are here on earth, I have never been sure what it

meant specifically. Raising children to be really good people is as high as folks like us can go in regard to purpose." He believes in religion, in an authority higher than anything on earth and that personal morality is founded in religious beliefs and that we must carry on with hope, the greatest of the virtues, in keeping with some part of a Divine Plan. "I have begun to feel that it all ties in with the cosmos, of whose beginning and end there has been much postulation but nothing like a rational answer, and indeed I don't believe mankind was ever intended to know the answer."

Lou rarely leaves the house and says her minister never visits, but many of the parishioners of a Disciples of Christ church do, or they call and keep in touch. She prays daily and reads the Bible. She says trust in God sees her through each day, and she finds solace in her prayers and thoughts about God. A daughter, aged 54, is terminally ill with cancer and they pray for one another and often speak of their belief in His mercy and are sustained by their faith.

Nolan, of Quaker parents, says: "I guess I do not believe in a personification of God. There is a saying: we are made in his image. No, I don't think so. I think we have created an image of God according to our own limitations and our own understanding. So, I do not personify God. I do believe that somehow, someway, because it's a universal, all encompassing thing... a universal intelligence of some sort, that doesn't predestine but in

some way gives us the spark of life that makes us as a human being unique. I believe in a Great Spirit, like the Indians do."

Religion and Religiosity

Religion, expressed in church attendance, or belonging to a definite sect, prayer or meditation was a major factor in eight of the ten respondents with regard to what gives them meaning in their lives. Riki, whose ancestors were Buddhist, has not attended any denominational services for years. Lottie reads the Bible, but was a practicing Jew in earlier years. Deidre still attends and is an active Episcopalian. Lora, Lore and Cel are practicing Catholics. Lou belongs to the Disciples of Christ. Nolan is of Quaker background but attends no services, finding his meaning in natural beauty and in friendships. Paula is a Methodist, active in church circles. Herbert, who raised his family as Catholics, is no longer active in his church. Paula, Deidre and Lore are the only regular church goers. Cel, Lora, Lou and Lottie no longer attend services because of physical disabilities. All of those interviewed had been born into religious families. That is, all attended religious services in their youths.

Lottie was born in Austria to Jewish parents and attended services regularly in the temple. Her husband was a Methodist, very active early in their marriage. She prays

every night, but not any more than when she was younger. And, she does not feel her faith is any deeper, just that she is more thoughtful. "But I didn't used to pray all the time." Now she does. She doesn't fear death but sickness disturbs her. And, she has been sick a lot. If she had twenty more years to live and she didn't walk with a cane she would travel. She once visited Australia and would like to travel there again. She reads the Bible. "I feel there is a God and He is rather omnipotent. I can't describe the feeling I have but I listen to a program broadcast from the Fundamentalists in California, but I don't know what the meaning of life is. I just believe in God and that's all there is to it." She believes in heaven, but not in a hell. It has been years since she attended church, but she did go to the Jewish synagogue in Nashville for some years.

To Paula, churches were places to join. She was a member of a Methodist Church in North Carolina. But, after returning to Lincoln in 1980, she did not go back to church. She did go to the Unity, a denomination that promotes positive Christianity, got their "daily word" and brought home "things like that," but does things more on her own. "I started remembering all the things that had happened in the past, crying while I was doing it, remembering the kind of life that I had lived, and now here I am trying to be a better person, and why did I do this and why did I do that and so on." She believes she is getting more spiritual

inwardly. She joined the United Methodist Church after her husband's death on the advice of a PEO sister and is very active in a number of groups. She prays in the morning and at night when she is by herself, and she says she prays while she is working around the house.

Nolan, on prayer: "I don't pray in a formalized way. As I get older and more reflective, and if reflection can be a form of prayer, then I do {pray}. I don't particularly go for denomination, for a programmed determination of what I think or how I shall think or how I shall pray or on what day I shall pray, because some of the most moving experiences of my life have been in the mountains. What can be more glorious than a mountain sunrise or sunset, or when I am snorkeling and see these fantastic fish--something new swimming by, or I am out on the kayak consorting with dolphins. George Fox, the founder of the religious Society of Friends, said that we shall embrace these things in our hearts, and someone said, 'the purest song comes not from the bird in a cage.'"

Riki was the only one interviewed who is still working. She is a social worker at a military hospital in Hawaii. As a child living on a plantation on Oahu, her family were members of the congregational church and a minister's wife was an early influence on her life. Her ancestors were Buddhist, but her father belonged to a Christian church but never attended services. He had a Buddhist funeral. In a

college course she learned about "low" and "high" religion and was influenced by the Fundamentalists. She later joined the Unitarian Church in Minnesota, but saw it as all social welfare issues and discarded it. She used to pray, but no longer does. There was a time in her life when she didn't believe in God. She thinks now there is a higher being and that there is a hereafter. She says, "I guess that in the last 25 years I have become more aware of what is really reality...your spirit can go on [after death]....It is important that you live your life in such a way that your spirit will be remembered in more positive terms." The themes of her life are serving others, in her role as a social worker, and in serving family and friends. Although she has never married, she visits and spends much time with sisters, nieces and nephews, and friends and wishes she had more time with them. She doesn't know when she will retire. She is 74, very energetic, and says she read somewhere that one longevity attribute is talking fast. She is a fast talker and has a delightful giggle.

Service to Others

Service to others was of major importance to all of those interviewed, both now and throughout their lives. To most of them, serving others gives them meaning in life, prevents anomie, and is a reason for existence. As Riki puts it, "The greatest satisfaction that I have is feeling

that I have been of service to people...working with people and feeling that you are contributing to their life, making things a little bit better; that is satisfying." The meaning of life, to Riki: "I think that means more in terms of living a life that other people will feel they've been served and, from a very personal angle, that I will live my life in such a way that it will bring me satisfaction in serving others and in being and to espouse ideas that will be of benefit to people in general. I think I have been a conservationalist all my life."

Five of those interviewed are into causes, ranging from legislative lobbying to environmental volunteerism. Deidre--working with the elderly; Lore--active lobbying for the elderly and disability issues; Henry--retirement and pension issues, Riki--still working as an MSW and Nolan--environmental issues. Paula and Cel, the two least active in service to others, have been long-term caregivers in the past to parents and spouses, but now seem more concerned with their own aging, although both are influential and caring about their children and grandchildren. Lora, the oldest, at age 92, still serves others, although homebound, by concern and assistance to family, friends and neighbors. She still prepares jams, breads and other home-baked products to give to friends and relatives. As a nurse, she has had a lifetime spent caring for others, including 16 years caring for an invalid brother, as well as her own

family of seven.

Lottie spent fifty-plus years serving veterans and their families in the Veterans Administration and later, with the disabled veterans, as a volunteer when the federal law mandated her retirement, which she regrets to this day. And, even though now physical disabilities impede her activity, she constantly seeks out her friends to entertain them and goes out to dinner with them weekly.

Learning

Education and learning were important for all of these individuals earlier in their lives. One has a doctorate in special education, another a master's in nursing education, Henry has a degree in business and three had business courses, or a certificate or a degree in business or accounting, one completed her nursing bachelor's, another nearly completed nursing studies. One has an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's in social work. Only one of the ten did not go beyond high school but has taken non-credit courses in geneology research.

To several of them, learning is still a theme in their lives. Nolan, for instance, learned mountain climbing in his 50s and ocean-kayaking in his 70s and has taken courses in environmental conservation and is well-versed in the creatures of the sea and the geology and history of Hawaii. Even those homebound now take an active interest in such

diverse subjects as geneology, legislative issues, both local and national, as well as, in Henry's case, becoming an expert in computer usage, including chess. Paula took up quilting and creative writing in her 80s. Lore is well-versed in the latest legislative issues affecting such causes as housing and the rights of the disabled, and lobbies actively at the state and local level. Riki, Henry, Lore, Deidre and Nolan continue to teach and train others. Henry does a weekly radio feature regarding legislative issues in Hawaii, and Nolan conducts tours several times a week. Riki works with medical and social interns at the hospital. Lore writes for aging periodicals and helps conduct workshops in lobbying. Deidre is active in the local area on aging, serving on the Mayor's Council. Only one of those interviewed, Cel, has had no activity since retirement, other than social interaction. However, she was a long-term caregiver for her parents until four years ago.

State of Current Health

Present health concerns of the ten interviewed did not provide a source of meaning in itself for most of them, but it did influence the extent to which each individual could realize activity and productivity. But, the level of activity and productivity was remarkable, in that many of them ignored health concerns and were able to participate fully in several activities. Seven interviewees spoke of

their present health concerns, either as an aside or as problems of the past. Two were in comparatively good health. Deidre was consumed with a back problem of recent origin and currently has been diagnosed as having asthma. But, in the past six months, her back problem is now minimal and she is in a physical therapy program which has made an emphysema/asthma problem something she can live with, and knowing that has given her a new outlook on life. In addition to two volunteer commitments, she is actively looking for part-time work, having been involved in researching and writing a history of the public park system in Lincoln. Her recent ailments were only minor deterrents, and she has gone back to her activities.

Lottie was active with the disabled veterans until five years ago, when, after wrecking a new car, she gave up driving. In spite of many major physical problems she still goes out for dinner and entertainment with gusto, with a little help from her friends. Cel is the most "into" her ailments and constantly doctors. Yet, she too, goes out socially. Lou, with terminal lung cancer, seldom gets out, but keeps in touch with her geneology friends by telephone and both gives and gets support from them and from significant others.

Only three, Lori, Cel and Lou, no longer attend church services because of their health problems. Church attendance for some ended years ago, but not because of

their state of health. Four have had major or chronic health problems when they were younger and spoke of them in giving their past history.

Eight of the ten were in good spirits when interviewed. Deidre was in extreme pain at the time of the interview. Now, she is "up." The subject of health or the state of health of each was not specifically asked in the interview, unless the matter came up. Yet, Henry, for instance, said he was considering cutting back on some of his activities because he perceived the need to compensate for lessening stamina, stating he needed to enjoy life more. He is asthmatic.

Losses

Kalish (1975), identified the basic needs of the elderly as essentially the same as those of all age groups: the need to have physiological and safety needs met, the need to feel loved so self esteem can be maintained, the need to be challenged, the need to realize one's own potential, and the need for dignity. All of the above he felt were as important in old age as in youth--in the dying process as in the rest of life. And, the losses of health, youth and family and friends by death were perceived by these interviewees in various ways to affect some of the needs Kalish spoke of.

"Some people put their grief in their pocket. My house

still has corners, but now they are empty corners." (Lou, speaking to the sense of loss after her spouse's death). Lou describes herself as having been puny all her life. She expected her husband to be there to take care of her. Now, he is gone. (He died three years ago.) She says she wakes up in the morning depressed and goes to bed depressed. Yet, she has a sense of humor, and chuckles easily. Lou saw the loss of her husband as the loss of someone who would care for her physical and safety needs, expecting her son to be the one who would take his father's place in caring for her. He has not stepped in, in her estimation, and so she feels lonely and unloved by him. This is her description: "So you see I lost my husband, I lost my eyesight, I lost 46 pounds and I lost my will to live. But I don't keep my grief in my pocket, like my cousin has. I think your grieving changes. I think you change. I think it's like teaching a child to eat carrots. 'I don't like 'em, I don't want 'em.' But, if you eat one slice and now next time you eat two slices and then pretty soon you will eat the whole carrot. And, I think if you take grief a slice at a time, pretty soon you will learn to live with it permanently but you are never free of it."

"I didn't start really living until my husband died, when I was 84. Now, I am independent." (Paula, about her life at 89). Paula viewed the death of her spouse as the first time she could really live and realize her own

potential which she is still searching and groping for. She sees her late 80's as a challenge: a time to do all the things she always wanted to do. Her losses include what she sees as lost opportunities: not finishing nurse's training, not going with the Chautauqua, and unfulfilled dreams.

Cel perceived her voluntary decision to come back to Nebraska to care for her parents as the loss of her freedom and independence. To her, old age and chronic illnesses rob her of self-esteem. So in a sense, she mourns her old age and the loss of her youth. Another big loss was her husband divorcing her, leaving her to return to her parents with a young son to raise.

Lora, in loving and glowing terms, relates the saga of the enlargement of the home in which she now lives to accommodate the caregiving of her elderly parents. It is the house where four of her five children were born, with photographs of family, both immediate and past, in every room. She had three living siblings when I interviewed her. One has since died. But, she converts the losses into a shrine, a place within her home where her religion, her loved ones and her devotion to others seem to merge and become one around and about her. She still mourns the losses, but those losses are also her life successes, in that for each of those gone she contributed to or sustained them in life and therein lies her integrity. Even the loss of mobility is somehow a crown on her head, because it does

not thwart her activities around the house. She has learned how to be as active as possible, in spite of them. Even when she sits in a glider-rocker, she rocks back and forth with agility, displaying an energy that belies the weakened bones in the 92 year old body.

Three experiences in Nolan's life epitomize how he faced losses. The first concerned his first job, right after he received his doctorate. His mother, who had Alzheimer's Disease, died on the same day. But, he had so many things going on in his life that he only grieved in a proper fashion later. As a young man in the cabinet-making business, he was nearly killed by a huge wind gust that blew off a heavy barn door, pinning him to the floor. "When I pulled myself out I went back in the shop and all of a sudden I was frightened and I was sweating and shaking uncontrollably and then I said, "If that damned door didn't kill me, nothing can!" In 1986, his manic-depressive son overdosed on aspirin and committed suicide. This coincided with his move to Hawaii. "I had kicked him out of the house years before but I knew that there was nothing I could do about his illness. Well, I was new here. I was elated about being here. My life here has been excellent, wonderful." But, as he told me of his son's death, he had a slight quaver in his voice. Nolan always has other things going for him that compensate for the loss.

Integrity or despair, as Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick

(1986) suggest, may result in how well one learns to transcend the ills of old age. Erikson believed that vital involvement or staying involved with the world would lure a person away from bodily and health preoccupation. The means utilized by Lora and Paula to cope with their losses differs. But, each recognizes the need for vital involvement in life. Cel, on the other hand, is more preoccupied with her health and her horror of aging than the others. It is noteworthy that Cel is less involved with the world in a real sense than the other two, even though she constantly watches television, agonizing over national and world events, in terms of what impact they have on her and her son and his business success. Nolan seemed to take all of his losses in stride by being involved in new opportunities, constantly adjusting to and changing his life-style.

CONCLUSIONS

This was a small study involving ten people who were from diverse backgrounds. The conclusions that follow describe the apparent interrelationships between the themes and values found in each of their lives.

1. <u>There is great diversity in the spiritual and religious viewpoints among the elderly</u>.

Contrary to the belief that older people tend to be homogeneous in their thinking, those interviewed in this

study demonstrated differences in their views of religion and spirituality. A sample of different age groups might reveal greater diversity.

Nolan, a Quaker as a youth, does not personify God but believes in a universal intelligence that gives us life but does not predestine our lives. Yet, he professes to believe in the Indian Great Spirit. He finds his spirituality in the observation of the beauty and awesomeness of nature.

Lora, a consummate Catholic, is immersed in ritual prayer. Yet her personal viewpoint is also universal. She epitomizes what Maslow (1968, 1970) addressed when he spoke of those who have a mystical high-plateau experience of perceiving the miraculous in ordinary things. She spoke of miracles in her life. Her Mother at 86 traded her own life in a barter with God to give Lora a long, cancer-free life when Lora had breast cancer surgery forty years ago. Her Mother died shortly after and there has been no further incidence of Lora's malignancy. She sees God as having guided her throughout her life: supplying an especially abundant garden with which she could feed her own family as well as the other relatives that she took into her own home and cared for.

Paula, at 89, is still searching for the meaning of her life, almost frantically it seems, seeking adventure in finding new friends and activities and taking up new pursuits.

Riki finds spirituality and meaning in her social work which has been her whole life for more than forty years. Although she does not pray she speaks of becoming more aware in the last 25 years of the importance of living life is such a way that your spirit will be remembered. She sees serving her family and her friends as very meaningful and a part of living life with a view to having served a higher being and gaining a place in the hereafter.

Henry believes in a higher authority, that personal morality is founded on religious beliefs, and that there is a Divine Plan, founded on hope, the greatest of the virtues. He does not believe that humans were ever intended to know the answers.

2. Physical health does not significantly impact the ability of older persons to perform the activities they value.

In some instances the older persons have adapted their activities to accommodate their physical limitations. But, most of the people continue to perform the duties and types of activities that they have always cherished, with little diminishment, except when circumstances not having to do with their physical ability have changed, or when they were convalescing or hospitalized.

For example, Lore uses public transportation now more than she does her automobile because she actively lobbied to secure better transportation for the elderly and those with

limited mobility. She still is as active in lobbying and advocacy as she was in former years even though she has a severe heart ailment, diabetes and phlebitis.

Nolan doesn't climb mountains anymore because he moved to where there are no mountains to climb. So he substituted another active sport which he finds satisfying. He admits to having slowed down in his reaction time to unforeseen obstacles when he is kayaking, but believes his awareness of the slowing down leads him to take more care and to be more deliberate in his actions.

Deidre curtailed temporarily her meetings and activities, due to a temporary physical setback. She has returned to those activities and added three days a week of physical therapy. She was the most athletic of any of the women interviewed, having been active in soccer and field hockey as a young woman and still swims laps in a pool adjacent to her apartment complex.

Lora continues to keep house and minister to a son, has daily contact with friends and family even though she is housebound and her hearing is very impaired even with a hearing aid. A rail along the hallway leading to her "shrine" aids her in her daily routine of checking all of her house plants. And a metal television stand with wheels serves as a side support when she walks about the house.

3. <u>The external religious activity of the older person has little or no relationship to his or her spiritual depth.</u>

Only two of the respondents went to church regularly. Four of them did not attend church services because of health reasons. The remainder have no church or religious affiliation now although all of them at one time or another had been associated with a religious denomination. Four had changed religious affiliations often in their lives. Yet all of them professed a belief in a higher power and nearly all of them prayed daily or saw spiritual meaning in their activities, families or their environment.

When asked where she would turn for help if she was terminally ill Cel replied that she would turn to prayer but that it would not give her support because she was "slightly religious but not spiritual." But she would pray because she would feel guilty if she had not prayed. "I don't have these in-depth thoughts that other people have. Such as the meaning of life." She feels that she is more spiritual and religious now because she is getting older and her feelings are deeper and "Maybe I believe more. Before, when I was younger you sort of took your religion for granted."

Deidre spoke of spirituality as having the Holy Spirit within you. She switched from the Episcopal to the Presbyterian Church when she came to this country as a young war bride and has been active within her church as were her children. She prays every night but doesn't read the scriptures as much as she used to. "I certainly do have a certain amount of faith." and she asked God to "give me the

courage and the strength to go through with this {her severe back ailment}."

4. Direct confrontation with sustained losses is an important source of spiritual meaning for the elderly.

These losses may consist of deaths, illnesses, widowhood, health, youth, vocations aspired to, and divorce. Facing loss is a source of strength and, in some cases, a source of satisfaction and triumph over adversity.

Lora has utilized and formed these losses of loved ones into a graphic display of her life for all to see. And she has grown spiritually as a result. But her method of assimilating loss and creating meaning differs greatly from that of Nolan, who seems to absorb his losses by becoming immersed in the varied cycles of his life.

Lore encountered severe illnesses years ago with complicated surgeries and post-surgical infections. Although she still recalls them in great detail, she remembers them as victories, resuming a long, busy life of nursing education in Samoa and in Hawaii.

Lou has always existed with bodily frailty and weakness sustained by faith and prayers. Paula recounts the vicissitudes of a lost nursing career, agonizing pregnancies, adjusting to life as a farmer's wife and, finally the death of her husband in 1986. She is now engaged in doing all the things she wanted to do, free of the perceived encumbrance of marriage and a spouse. Yet,

she regrets his not being here to turn to.

Bianci (1986) says that "life itself in its daily struggles, is the primary locus of holiness" (p. 137). We need to "have faced and dealt directly with the fact of loss in older years" (Bianci, 1986, p. 137). Thus, we establish continuity with our past. Avoidance of loss makes religious growth difficult. The manner in which these individuals confronted their past and current losses and discontinuities has shaped their lives in mostly positive ways.

5. Positive self-concept and close family ties are significantly related to and enhance the ability of the older person to lead an autonomous existence.

In spite of physical frailty and severe ailments in six of those interviewed, all maintain strong independence and autonomy and live in their own homes. All ten respondents have close relationships with family or friends, usually both. But, they serve others more than they ask to be served. All demonstrated the affection they feel for their families and spoke of their affection openly and often in the interviews. Rarely did any of them speak of assistance they received or their dependency on their children or others.

Deidre demonstrated the sustaining power of family by the support her daughter gave her during her physical illness and the support she is turn gave to her daughter in the daughter's mental and physical illnesses.

Lou wished her son would visit her more since his Father's death. And her grandchildren do her yard work, but most of the time she lives alone. She did quit driving about six months ago and one of her family takes her shopping and to the hairdresser weekly.

Cel describes her ailments as severe (incontinence, gastro-intestinal problems, and, perceived, but not medically diagnosed, cancer). She has repeatedly rejected her son's open invitation to re-locate in California in, or near his home. Although she has given the offer considerable thought and her worst fear is dying alone she continues to remain in Nebraska where many of her friends and nieces reside. She weighs that fear of dying alone against the recognition that a move to California would foment dependence on her son and his family. She has chosen greater autonomy.

Lottie has numerous physical problems any one of which could cause the loss of her independence. Still, she lives alone, with some outside assistance.

6. <u>Serving others is significantly related to a positive self-concept for the older person.</u>

All ten respondents had demonstrated some form of service to others in many diverse ways. Several had given care for extended periods of time to family members. Several had been involved in public service or in teaching. Riki continues to be an active social worker who also trains

young medical residents and leads practicum courses for military personnel. All but two are still involved in some manner in serving others. Many do volunteer work.

Lore became vitally interested in an acquaintance afflicted with epilepsy and depression. As a result, she now has added advocacy for the rights of the disabled to her lobbying efforts for the elderly population. She personally serves as a mentor and de facto guardian for this person.

Nolan conducts marine classes and gives tours. Henry keeps abreast of timely issues for retired federal employees. Deidre assists in training the developmentally disabled. Most of them actively serve family and friends with very few instances where they are served by their families or friends.

7. <u>There is a significant positive relationship between spirituality and well-being in the elderly.</u>

The extrinsic religious person that Allport (1950) identified as someone who used religion as a means to other ends is characterized by Paula. Paula joined churches for status and companionship and security. Yet she displayed spirituality in her prayers and in her search for meaning. Several people in this study seemed to be involved in a search for meaning--they were "questors", still in an ongoing search. Lora and Nolan epitomize those who have gone beyond searching. They have found meaning and are content.

All of the respondents seemed to be spiritual in their

own complex ways. They demonstrated in their past and present lives a positive sense of worth and most seemed to be at peace with themselves. There was an awareness of death with very little expression of concern or apprehension.

8. The creativity of the human spirit reaches its culmination in the final years of life.

These older individuals readily adapted to changes in their physical health and the losses and setbacks throughout their lives. They demonstrated the ability to utilize their inner strengths based on hope and faith in themselves and in God in such a manner that their lives continue to be full and satisfying with their paths upward, not downward. Their creativity is displayed in the changes in their beliefs and attitude toward the Creator, religion, and the personal meaning of their lives. Several spoke of how their viewpoint about God, their religion and their personal philosophy had changed several times in their lives. Some at times had doubted the existence of God and questioned the meaning of His presence at different times in their lives. Spirituality and religiousness are intrinsic to the aging process in myriad individual ways.

The Shrine

For Lora, the oldest and most house-bound of the ten, religion **is** her life. Her house is a veritable shrine, with

pictures of the saints, crucifixes, rosaries intermingled with old and new family photographs. In fact, the back bedroom is a shrine. It was built on to the house to accommodate her parents, who lived into their 90's and who required her personal care in their final years. It contains two hospital beds, meticulously clean and surrounded by living plants that she is very proud of, as well as old portraits of her family, and she always takes visitors to this room, wherein lies her life history. She is still a pillar of the church, in contact, in person and by telephone with the parish priest. She had three siblings who were nuns or priests and a daughter who is a former nun. Her day is governed by two main duties: the need to watch a daily Mass at 7:00 A. M. on a religious television channel, followed by Mother Angelica, and then she says her rosary, followed by household duties: cooking, baking, cleaning, caring for about twenty house plants and preparing meals for her youngest son, who lives with her. She is 92 and in spite of osteoporosis and the fear of another back fracture, she is energetic, caring for her houseplants, house, family and God, in reverse order. Her Catholicism and deep faith are there for all to see. She looks forward to a weekly visit from a priest who brings her Communion and briefly visits her. Not only her large family, but also many old friends and neighbors are important to her and they keep in contact by telephone or visits to her. She was the most

deeply religious person of all interviewed, even though she rarely attends church service (other than via television), because of the difficulty or danger of a fall or a movement that would cause her brittle bones to fracture. In her, religion and spirituality seem to be completely merged and inseparable.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualitative Results

The ten people interviewed were not a homogeneous sample. Nor were their ages and life situations similar. They demonstrated the diversity of older people in this country. There was someone still in a life career at 74; a very spiritual 92 year-old still functioning as a homemaker; a 75 year-old obsessed with her aging and her psychosomatic and real physical problems; an 84 year-old daily lobbying on legislative issues; a 74 year-old male putting in a full-time schedule as a volunteer tour guide, ocean kayaking in his spare time; a 65 year-old temporarily disabled with a back problem; and a 79 year-old terminally ill widow reminiscing about grief and the loss of a spouse.

Religion, that is, involvement in a specific church, was an integral part of life for six of those interviewed. While two of them could not attend church regularly, religion was a vital theme in their lives and had always been. The other four had no current ties with any organized religion.

Spirituality was a significant factor for nine of those interviewed, and the tenth saw her ongoing career of service to others as the goal of her life, in itself a form of spirituality. Spirituality took diverse forms, ranging from

a very personal one-on-one relationship "an inner feeling of faith." as one respondent put it, to a higher authority, some sort of divine plan for the universe: a plan that "mankind was never intended to know the answer {to}."

As to prayer, all but one prayed or meditated often, most of them on a daily basis. Some utilized formal prayers, reading the Bible, praying the rosary, while another found his prayer in the contemplation of natural beauty in the mountains or on the sea.

Family and close friends were themes of every one of them, even though many friends and family were at a distance. They kept in touch by telephone and letter. Even those with no close or immediate family found relationship and love of others and service to family as important. Their emphasis is on service to the family or others, not the love and services they received. For most of them the love and devotion seemed more selfless than selfish, even though such closeness was a two-way street.

Service to others was a theme that went beyond family and friends, in that, either now or in their careers, they had taught, trained, nursed, caregiven, were public servants or advocates for others and derived meaning in their lives as a result of this service. Volunteerism was a related theme.

Learning and education were important to them. Nine had gone beyond high school and three had graduate degrees.

All but one were still eager for knowledge, from environmental issues to quilting to the study of legislative issues and causes.

And, finally, the loss of loved ones, jobs, physical setbacks and disappointments had either been overcome, with life resuming and becoming more positive, or the loss was confronted and lived with on a day-to-day basis. Even the terminally ill widow had a philosophical outlook that was positive, in spite of her setbacks. Their losses were interwoven into their persons, generally strengthening and giving meaning to their lives.

Conclusions and Suggestions For Further Research

The role of qualitative research has grown in gerontology and is coming of age, in personal meaning, cultural analysis and narrative studies (Gubrium, 1992). Qualitative research can serve as a preliminary study for quantitative analysis studies and can be combined with quantified studies. Qualitative research is scientific, because its goal is to discover theoretical evidence and because it is empirical. The meaning and findings develop retrospectively. And, sometimes, what is said at one point by an interviewee may seem contradicted by what is said later. For example, Cel, who spoke of herself as not very religious or spiritual, also talked about her belief in God in a profound manner. As the theories of aging have

changed, from continuity to discontinuity, from activity to disengagement, from a final life cycle to a subculture, or from a dynamic process to cohort commonality, so, perhaps, do individuals change their concept of their own aging. Florida Scott-Maxwell (1968) was puzzled by the perceptible change in her concept of herself: instead of a quiet time, she found her seventies fairly serene, but that gave way to an increased intensity in her eighties, when she felt moral fervor, even though she felt she was too frail for such intensity.

Further research is necessary to find out whether spirituality and religion are generally an important part of older people's lives. The major limitations of this study are the small sample, the breadth of ethnicity and class is narrow and the small number of men. In addition, a reformulation of the questions used, with a deeper probe of spirituality and the meaning of life with additional interviews would reveal more themes and greater insight. In reformulating the questions, there might be less chance of investigator bias.

Other studies performed, such as Kaufman (1986) and Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986) utilized selected middle class people who were physically more active and perhaps better educated than the general older population. Selecting more varied groups, from different population segments, such as people living in their own homes, those in

nursing homes or retirement facilities and those in rural versus urban areas, or those living in poorer neighborhoods contrasted with those in affluent surroundings might yield less homogeneous results.

In spite of the limitations of this study, there was more diversity in this non-random sample than might have been expected. Its limitations point out the need for additional studies and provide a temptation to return to these people for a type of longitudinal study that would further attempt to fathom their thoughts, feelings and ideas as they enter their eighties and nineties and come ever closer to the end time of their fruitful lives.

> Aging is the turning of the wheel, the gradual fulfillment of the life cycle in which receiving matures into giving and living makes dying worthwhile. Aging does not need to be hidden or denied, but can be understood, affirmed and experienced as a process of growth by which the the mystery of life is slowly revealed to us. (Nouwen, 1974, p.14)

REFERENCES

Alexander, B. B., Rubinstein, R. L., Goodman, M., & Luborsky, M. (1992). A path not taken: a cultural analysis of regrets and childlessness in the lives of older women. The Gerontologist, 32, 618-626.

Allport, G. W. (1950). The individual and his religion: A psychological interpretation. New York: Macmillan.

Allport, G. W. (1968). The person in psychology: Selected essays. Boston: Beacon Press.

American Psychiatric Association. (1988).Thesaurus of psychological index terms. (5th ed.) Washington, DC.

Battista, J., Almond, R. (1973). The development of meaning in life. Psychiatry,36, 409-427.

Bianchi, E. C. (1986). Aging as a spiritual Journey. New York: Crossroad.

Butler, R. N. (1963). The life review: an interpretation of reminiscence in the aged. Psychiatry: Journal For The Study Of Interpersonal Processes. 26, 55-76).

Butler, R. N. (1975). Why survive? Being old in america. New York: Harper & Row.

Butler, R. N. & Lewis, M. (1982). Aging and mental health: Positive psychosocial approaches. (3rd ed.) St Louis: C. V. Mosby.

Campbell, J., with Moyers, B. (1988). The power of myth (1st ed.). New York: Doubleday.

Carson, R. A. (1986). Forward. In, T. R. Cole & S. Gadow, (Eds.). What does it mean to grow old? Durham: Duke University Press.

Clements, W. M. (1985). Aging and the dimensions of spiritual development. Journal of religion and aging. 2(1/2), 127-136.

Cole, T. R., & Gadow, S. (1986). What does it mean to grow old? Durham: Duke University Press.

Darley, J. M. & Batson, C. D. (1973). "From Jerusalem to Jericho": a study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior. Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology, 27, 100-108.

Erikson, E. H. (1959). Identity and the life cycle: Psychological issues. New York: International Universities Press.

Erikson, E. H. (1963). Childhood and society. (2nd ed.) New York: W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1982). The life cycle completed: A review. New York: W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1985). The life cycle completed. New York: W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H., Erikson, J. & Kivnick, H. (1986). Vital involvement in old age. New York: W. W. Norton.

Fecher, V. J. (1982). Religion and aging: An annotated Bibliography. San Antonio: Trinity University Press.

Fowler, J. (1981). Stages of faith. New York: Harper & Row.

Frankl, V. E. (1959). Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy. Boston: Beacon, 1959.

Frankl, V. E. (1966). What is meant by meaning? Journal Of Existentialism, 7, 21-28.

Frankl, V. E. (1975). The unconscious god: Psychotherapy and theology. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Gallup, G. (1984). Religion in america. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Religious Research Center.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory. Chicago: Aldine.

Gubrium, J. F. (1992). Qualitative research comes of age in Gerontology. The Gerontologist, 32(5), 581-582.

Jaffe, A. (1979) Myth of meaning. New York: Putnam.

Jung, C. G. (1933). Modern man in search of a soul. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Jung, C. G. (1938). Psychology and religion. In Collected Works Vol. 11 (2nd ed.), 1969. 3-105. New York: Pantheon.

Jung, C. G. (1952a) Answer to Job. In Collected Works, Vol. 11 (2nd ed.), 1969, (pp. 355-470). New York: Pantheon.

Jung, C. G. (1965). Memories, dreams and reflections. New York: Vintage.

Jung, C. G. (1969). The stages of life. In Collected Works. Vol.11 (2nd ed.), 1969, (pp. 387-403). New York: Pantheon.

Kalish, R. (1975). Late adulthood: Perspectives on human development. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Kalish, R. (1984). Death, grief, and caring relationships. (2nd ed.) . Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Kastenbaum, R. (1973). Epilogue: Loving, dying and other gerontologic addenda. In, C. Eisdorfer & M. P. Lawton (Eds.), The psychology of adult development and aging. Washington: American Psychiatric Association. 699-708.

Kaufman, S. (1986). The ageless self-sources of meaning in late life. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Kimble, M. A. (1990). Aging and the search for meaning. Journal Of Religious Gerontology.7, 1/2 111-129.

LeFevre, C., & LeFevre, P. (Eds.). (1985). Aging and the human spirit: A reader in religion and gerontology (2nd ed.). Chicago: Exploration Press.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1984). Naturalistic inquiry. London: SAGE.

Maas, H. S. & Kuypers, J. A. (1974). From thirty to seventy San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Maslow, A. H. (1964). Religious values and peak experiences. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

Maslow, A. H. (1966). The psychology of science: A reconnaissance. New York: Harper & Row.

Maslow, A. H. (1968). Toward a psychology of being. (2nd ed.). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Maslow, A. H. (1970). Motivation and personality. (2nd ed.) New York: Harper & Row.

Mindel, C. H., & Vaughn, C. E. (1978). A multidimensional approach to religiosity and disengagement. Journal Of Gerontology, 33, 103-108.

Moberg, D. O. (1965). Religiosity in old age. The Gerontologist, 5, 78-87,111-112.

Moberg, D. O. (1970). Spiritual well-being in late life. In, J. F. Gubrium (Ed.), Late Life. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Moberg, D. O. (1990). Religion and aging. In, K. F. Ferraro(Ed.), Gerontology Perspectives And Issues. New York: Springer 179-205.

Moody, H. R. (1986). The meaning of life and the meaning of old age. In T. R. Cole & S. Gadow (Eds.), What does it mean to grow old? Durham:Duke University Press, 9-40.

Neugarten, B. (1973). Personality change in later life. In, C. Eisdorfer & M. P. Lawton (Eds.), The psychology of adult development and aging. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 311-335.

Nouwen, H. J. M., & Gaffney, W. J. (1976). Aging: The fulfillment of life. New York: Image.

Payne, B. P. (1982). Religiosity. In D. J. Mangen & W.A. Peterson (Eds.), Research instruments in social gerontology: Social roles and social participation. Volume 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Payne, B. P. (1990). Research and theoretical approaches to spirituality and aging. Generations,14(4), 11-14.

Reinharz, S. (1984). On becoming a social scientist: From survey research and participant observations to experiential analysis. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Rowles, G. D., & Reinharz, S.(1988). Qualitative gerontology:themes and challenges. In S. Reinharz & G.D. Rowles (Eds.) Qualitative gerontology. New York: Springer, 3-33.

Sarton, M. (1973). Journal of a solitude. New York: Norton.

Scott-Maxwell, F. (1968). The measure of my days. New York: A. A. Knopf.

Tolstoy, L.(1929). My confession, my religion, the gospel in brief. New York: Charles Scribner.

Wulff, D. M. (1991). Psychology of religion. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Yalom, I. D. (1980). Existential psychotherapy. New York: Basic Books.

Yalom, I. D. (1989). Love's executioner. New York: Basic Books.

Young, G., & Dowling, W. (1987). Dimensions of religiosity in old age: Accounting for variation in types of participation. Journal of Gerontology,42 376-380.

THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

Interview Guide

Chronology of Events

When and where were you born? Significance.
What are your earliest memories?
Who was a part of your family? Siblings, others.
Tell me about your parents, their background.
Tell me about your childhood.
Can you describe yourself as a child?
What were you doing in your adolescence or when young?
What was it like for your? What were you interested in?
What stands out in your mind in your early adult years?
What were you like then?
What kind of religious background did you have?
Were you spiritual in those times? Explain.
Was your family involved in religion?
Would you say they were spiritual?
Tell me of your first job, leaving home, college, marriage.
What did you think about then? What did you want to do in life?
What about your children?
Tell me about your career/ occupation. What were you like at 30, at 40, at 50, at 60? How would others have described you?
Who influenced you at various times of your life? How? When?
Tell me about you retirement and how you felt about retiring.

The Present

Could you describe to me a typical day?
Who are the people closest to you?
How often do you see them?
How many friends would you say you have now?
If you were told you were terminally ill, where would you go for help?

Life Review

What are the most important times/successes in your life? Frustrations?
Did you have some important turning points in your life? What were you doing then? What were like then?
What experiences in your life would you say were the most influential?
If you were writing your life story, would it have chapters? Tell me about them.
Do you remember some periods of your life more than

others? Which? Why?
What kinds of things now make you afraid?
What about in the past: 60,50,40,30, child?
What do you get the most pleasure from now?
If you could live life over again, what would you do differently? Why?

Personal Philosophy

Are you like your mother or your father? Unlike?
Do you feel differently about yourself now than when you were younger? How?
What is your best and worst quality?
Do you have a philosophy of life?
What would you tell a young person who asked what the most important thing in living a good life was?
Is there meaning to life? If so, what?
What has stayed the same in or about you throughout life? What has changed?
What do you see when you look in a mirror?

Aging and Spirituality

How can we prepare for old age?
Did you have any expectations at times in your life about what growing older would be like?
How do you feel about growing old now?
If you were going to live 20 more years, what would you do? How would you like that? What plans would you make?
What is the hardest thing about growing older? The best thing?
What does it mean to be spiritual?
What does it mean to be religious?
Is there a difference?
Would you say you have a deep belief in God? Describe your belief.
Would you say you were more spiritual/religious now than you were at 60, 50, 40, 30, 20, as a child? How? Why or why not?
Do you think about the future? Make plans?
What are your concerns for the future?
What do you look forward to?
Do you think about death? How often? Are you afraid to die? Why/why not?
Do you pray? How? When? Where? Why? Do you pray as often as you did in earlier years?
When were you the most spiritual? Was it at a particular turning point in your life?
What would you say was the most meaningful thing in your early life?
Did the purpose of your life change in later years? When? How?