

HUMAN SPIRIT AS A MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE TO THE
ELDERLY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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To the Provost of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Lucy Rosalind Bland Trice entitled "Human Spirit as a Meaningful Experience to the Elderly: A Phenomenological Study." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Nursing.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Jesus Christ from Whom came the inspiration, and to David Trice who saw its completion as a reality even when I did not.

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Helen Bush for her invaluable assistance during the formulation of this dissertation. She had a seemingly endless supply of encouragement and patience and was never too busy to listen or to answer a question.

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ABSTRACT

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The problem of the study was to determine the essential structure of an experience from life during which the elderly derive a sense of meaning to life as a manifestation of the human spirit. The data gathered were also examined for classification of the descriptions into the categories postulated in Frankl's (1966) theory of the will to meaning as being categories into which meaningful experiences may be grouped.

The study was primarily qualitative, utilizing a phenomenological approach. Individuals ranging in age from 65 to 87 years were interviewed to obtain descriptions of life experiences through which were derived a sense that life was meaningful. Persons were interviewed until common themes emerged. The sample was one of availability and consisted of 11 participants, 9 female and 2 male.

The descriptions obtained from the participants were analyzed according to Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method. The essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly was identified, with the common themes being concern for others, helpfulness, action, and positiveness. The experiences related were all classifiable into Frankl's categories of creative action, experiential receptivity, and attitude toward condition in life, thus supporting that Frankl's categories are indeed the categories into which meaningful experiences may be placed. The data also offered preliminary support for the framework of the human spirit developed by Trice (1983). Trice's framework includes the critical attributes of essence, vision, action, and zeal.

Implications for nursing included the suggestion that nurses adopt a broader view of the human spirit to incorporate the facet of meaning to life. Nurses need to assess the meaning to life aspect in clients as well as consciously plan care aimed at promoting, maintaining, and restoring a sense of meaning to life.

Recommendations for further study entailed repeating the study on a sample of elderly men to determine validity of the structure for elderly men as well as elderly women. Also, the study should be repeated on other ethnic and age

groups to ascertain if the structure is unique to one age or culture, or perhaps universal.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of interest in the study was the human spirit, particularly manifestation of the spirit in the elderly population. The major concern of nurses and nursing since the time of Florence Nightingale has been the human person in the sense of the person's entirety--body, mind, and spirit. The biological and psychological aspects of the human person have been studied and discussed at length, and the body of nursing knowledge developed accordingly. The same level of knowledge does not exist concerning the spiritual aspect of the human person.

The lack of knowledge concerning the spiritual aspect of the human is perhaps best illustrated by the results of a study published by Highfield and Cason in 1983 in which nurses dealing with cancer patients were studied in an attempt to determine the nurses' awareness of the spiritual needs and problems of cancer patients. Nurses caring for cancer patients were chosen because of the belief that a diagnosis of cancer results in a crisis for a person's physical, psychological, and spiritual health,

seemingly making cancer patients a prototype of patients with spiritual needs. The results of the study suggested that the nurses involved had only a limited awareness of the spiritual needs and problems of cancer patients. In addition, many of the problems that were recognized were improperly categorized as psychosocial rather than spiritual. The authors pointed out that this in itself is a significant finding since an appropriate plan of care is dependent on accurate diagnosis of the problem.

A number of authors including theologians, psychologists and philosophers as well as lay people (Adler, 1928; Binns, 1980; Frankl, 1962; Hillman, 1967; Jourard, 1974; Murphy, 1982; Sinnot, 1958; Stern, 1971) suggested that the spirit manifests itself in seeking a purpose or meaning to life, what Frankl (1962) in particular called the will to meaning. In addition, the literature supports that a loss of the sense of meaning to life can have devastating results (Binns, 1980, Frankl, 1962; Jourard, 1974; Klinger, 1977). The later adult years are a time when many of the opportunities for pursuits that have been traditionally associated with meaning to life such as working at a job, caring for a home and/or family, and independence, are diminished. Is it still possible for the elderly to have a sense of meaning in life? Is

there a way for nurses caring for the elderly to help foster a sense of meaning? If the elements that make up personal experiences that are perceived as meaningful by the elderly could be identified and the essential structure of a meaningful experience derived, perhaps the elements or the structure could be introduced into the care of the elderly. In this way, it might be possible to provide situations through which the elderly could derive a sense of meaningfulness in life. This possibility was the impetus for the present investigation into identifying the essential structure of a meaningful experience as described by the elderly.

Statement of Problem

The problem of the study was to determine the essential structure of a life experience through which or during which the elderly derive a sense of meaning to life as a manifestation of the human spirit. In addition, the data gathered were utilized to answer the following research question: Can the experiences described as meaningful by the elderly be placed into one of the three categories suggested by Frankl (1966)?

Justification of Problem

In presenting the pertinent information to serve as a background and justification for the study, it is necessary to discuss the human spirit briefly before dealing more specifically with meaning to life and the elderly.

The use of the term spirit can be traced in the literature for centuries. Spirit is a popular topic among philosophers from Aristotle to Santayana, among theologians, among psychologists, and among lay writers as well. The giving of "spiritual care" crops up periodically in professional nursing literature also with at least one spiritual assessment guide having been published by Stoll in 1979. In addition, nursing texts frequently have a section devoted to the giving of spiritual care. What seems to be missing from the nursing literature is an analysis of what the care is aimed at, the human spirit. Although the exact reason for the neglect is unclear, Jung (1957) suggested a possible explanation in the statement that "one of our most deeply rooted convictions [is that] the soul [is] the best known of all knowables . . . not only every psychologist, but every layman has an opinion about it" (p. 15). While Jung addressed the lack of an in-depth study of the human spirit in Jung's own discipline, the observation is apropos to the nursing profession

as well. Just as a basic understanding of the nature and function of any other aspect of the human person is necessary in order to give care to that aspect, so it would seem is a basic understanding of the nature and function of the human spirit necessary in order to give care to this aspect of the human person.

The word spirit itself comes from the Latin, spiritus, meaning breath, breath of life, real meaning; and from the Latin verb, spiro, to breathe (Simpson, 1959). In addition, Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (McKechnie, 1979) defined spirit as "the life principle . . . the thinking, feeling, motivating part of man . . . the real meaning or true intention" (p. 1750).

The particular area at which the present study took a closer look is the area of true meaning, in this case true meaning to life. The importance of a sense of meaning to life was recognized as far back as the time of Moses. In Deuteronomy 8:3 is the statement that "[mankind] does not live by bread alone." The particular portion of mankind of interest for the present investigation was the elderly.

Jesus Christ once said, "the poor you will have with you always." For the purposes of the present study, an appropriate paraphrase might be, "the elderly you will

have with you always." The prediction has been made that the number of individuals over 65 years of age in the United States will increase by about 500,000 per year from 1981 to 2030 (Abdellah, 1981). Expressed in another fashion, the prediction means that in the next half century, the population will move from approximately 1 in 9 to approximately 1 in 6 over the age of 65 years. By the year 2030, it is estimated that about 20% of the population in the United States will be in the elderly group (Abdellah, 1981). Of the elderly segment of the population, 85% have at least one chronic illness; indeed, 70% of all acute care hospital beds are occupied by the elderly (Tollet & Adamson, 1982). Quite obviously, as the largest health care profession, nursing has the opportunity to play an important role in the care of the elderly. Rankin and Burggraf (1983) have gone so far as to say that nursing has the responsibility of assuming the leadership role in the area.

Storlie (1982) identified the nursing home as a particularly problematic area. Storlie contended that there is a personal devaluation process that occurs in conforming to society's expectation of the elderly and that the devaluation is best exemplified in nursing homes. Storlie described the nursing home environment as taking away from

the elderly autonomy, useful activity, and control over body or activities of daily living.

Schwirian (1982) agreed with Storlie's (1982) estimation that nursing homes are not places that the elderly look forward to moving into with enthusiasm. However, Schwirian (1982) pointed out that many of the practices in nursing homes, such as set times for meals and other activities of daily living and small or shared living space, are economically efficient and are probably not apt to change in the near future. Schwirian contended that attention should be directed beyond physical needs and aimed at psychosocial needs.

Frankl (1984), the well-known author-psychiatrist, would agree with Schwirian (1982). Specifically, Frankl (1984) stated that the most human of all needs is the will to meaning. In Frankl's experiences in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, Frankl indicated that it was the sense of meaning to life that enabled many of Frankl's fellow inmates to survive the rigors of the death camp, while others, who did not have the sense of meaning or who lost it, would simply give up and die (Frankl, 1962).

Other writers also support a sense of meaningfulness to life as important to well-being. A theologian, Binns,

writing in Theology (1980) described a number of cases of women who, faced with the loss of perceived meaning in life, became ill with strange maladies, exhibited behaviors ultimately harmful to the self, or simply withdrew from human contact. Binns indicated that each reaction was a spiritual one, in response to loss of meaning to life. Adler (1928) described meaning as a goal which may be static or dynamic but which affects all aspects of the individual's life. A sense of destiny was how Hillman (1967) described meaning to life. Jourard (1974) simply called it the reason for living and suggested that when meaning is lost, the individual begins to die.

Frankl (1962) described recognizing specific behaviors in fellow concentration camp inmates that were indicators of loss of meaning. The behaviors were followed within a few days by the inmate's death either through succumbing to natural causes or through some form of suicide. More recently, Maddi (1967) described what is called the existential neurosis in which the individual involved loses all sense of purpose in life. Cognitively, the individual is unable to believe in the "truth, importance, [or] usefulness" (p. 313) of anything the individual is doing. In addition, affectively the individual appears bland and bored. In terms of activity, there is little or

no selectivity involved since the individual does not view any action as meaningful. While Maddi did not go so far as to indicate that death was the logical outcome of the disorder, the picture painted was very grim.

Again the question is posed, is it possible for elderly individuals to have a sense of meaning to life? Can the nurses caring for the elderly individuals help foster a sense of meaning? While nurses may not be able to alter drastically the fact that many of the activities that have traditionally been associated with meaning to life are not available for many of the elderly for whom the nurses are caring, perhaps there is another way. If a description of the essential structure of a meaningful experience for the elderly existed, perhaps the structure could be utilized in devising a plan of care that would aid the elderly person in perceiving a sense of meaning in everyday life. The possibility that such a use could be made of the essential structure of an experience through which or during which a sense of meaning to life was derived by the elderly served as part of the impetus for the present investigation.

The point should be made here that the purpose of the study was not to attempt to establish any sort of empirical proof that the spirit exists but rather to investigate

the manifestation of the spirit in the everyday life of a particular group, the elderly, in order to better understand the function and, therefore, malfunction of the spiritual aspect of the human person. As noted earlier, the problem of the study was to determine the essential structure of a life experience through which or during which the elderly derive a sense of meaning to life as a manifestation of the human spirit. The structure derived can then serve as the starting point for further research.

Theoretical Framework

One of the purposes of many qualitative research projects is to develop a conceptual framework within which the phenomenon of interest may be placed. Accordingly, a major objective of the present study was to derive the essential structure which will represent a meaningful life experience to the elderly. However, there was an existing theoretical framework which was considered to serve as a frame of reference for the study. In addition, the data collected were used to test the particular part of the framework dealing with categories into which meaningful experiences may be classified. The framework in question

was that of the will to meaning as developed by Frankl (1966).

Frankl (1966) postulated that the human person "lives in three dimensions: the somatic, the mental, and the spiritual" (p. x). Further, Frankl stipulated that it is the spiritual dimension that in effect "makes us human" (p. x). The spiritual dimension is manifested through behavior related to the will to meaning.

There are three broad categories or areas in which the human person may exercise or experience will to meaning. One is in creative action. The category encompasses such activities as the individual's duties in relation to job and family. The emphasis is on the "how" rather than the "what." That is, emphasis is not on the importance of the individual's job in the world's eyes but rather on how the individual performs that job.

A second area is that of experience or "receptivity toward the world" (Frankl, 1966, p. 43). An example might be the meaning that can be experienced by steeping the self in the beauty of nature or in prayerful communion with God or perhaps in an exquisite rendition of a favorite symphony.

The third area in which meaning to life can be found is in the individual's attitude toward the individual's

condition or lot in life. In particular, this refers to the attitude toward the restricting factors in life. In this manner, even individuals faced with catastrophe, such as individuals who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, can still experience meaning to life by the manner in which the catastrophe is borne.

While the categories may be viewed as progressively less active, Frankl (1966) warned that they should not be viewed as of decreasing importance. Frankl maintained that will to meaning could be manifested equally successfully through any of the categories.

A second framework considered to serve as a frame of reference for the present study was the framework of the human spirit developed by Trice (1983). Following a review of literature that included literature from the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, theology, and nursing as well as lay literature, Trice derived a framework for the human spirit that included the four critical attributes of essence, vision, action, and zeal. The attribute of essence was meant to embody the notion that the spirit represents the true self or the part of the individual that makes the individual a unique person. The term vision was chosen to represent the notion that meaning to life, whether the experiencing of or the pursuit

of, is the province of the spirit, the work of the spirit, so to speak. Vision was meant to be dynamic in nature, suggesting the possibility that how an individual pursues meaning to life or what gives meaning to life for an individual is not necessarily the same for the entire life span of the individual. The term action was meant to convey the notion that when the spirit is involved, there is action or activity as opposed to passivity. The action involved is in relation to the pursuit of or the experiencing of meaning to life (vision). Finally, the attribute of zeal was meant to capture the passionate, energetic, stimulating nature of the human spirit that Trice found referred to so frequently in the literature.

The problem statement which guided the study dealt with determining the essential structure of a life experience through which or during which the elderly experience a sense of meaning to life as a manifestation of the human spirit. While the qualitative nature of the study precluded beginning the study with preconceived ideas of what the findings would be, the frameworks of both Frankl (1966) and Trice (1983) still served as frames of reference. Frankl's (1966) framework was of particular use by its suggestion of the wide range of experiences that could be described by the elderly as meaningful. In addition,

the data collected would be appropriate to answer a research question concerning the portion of the framework dealing with the categories into which meaningful experiences may be placed.

Research Question

The study was primarily qualitative but also contained a quantitative component. In accord with the quantitative component, a research question was developed which could be answered by the data gathered. A research question was appropriate for two reasons: (a) the research question was drawn from one of the theoretical frameworks that served as frames of reference for the study and (b) the nature of the research question was such that it did not prejudice the investigator in terms of the derivation of an essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly.

The research question developed for the study was: Can the experiences described as meaningful by the elderly be placed into one of the three categories suggested by Frankl (1966)? These categories include (a) creative action, (b) experiential receptivity, and (c) attitude toward condition in life.

Each of the categories was drawn directly from Frankl's (1966) theory concerning the will to meaning described previously in the section devoted to theoretical framework. Groundwork for the quantitative portion of the study was laid by Ballard in 1965. Ballard studied Frankl's notion of the search for meaning in a group of hospitalized patients with tuberculosis. Ballard's findings suggested that among the patients who indicated having a sense of meaning to life, the sense of meaning was derived through some form of accomplishment; through the steeping of the self in some experience, for example, the love of another individual; or through the attitude taken toward suffering (Ballard, 1965). The categories found by Ballard are the same categories that in the present investigation might be found to be present among the experiences described as meaningful by the elderly.

In addition, the present investigation should generate other research questions as well as hypotheses. The essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly, once derived, should lend itself to questions as well as hypotheses relating to whether or not the structure could be utilized to improve the sense of meaning to life of the institutionalized elderly; to whether or not the structure is cross-cultural in nature or useful only

for a specific ethnic group; and to whether or not the structure is truly age specific or is perhaps appropriate for all ages, to mention only a few of the questions or hypotheses possible.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made for the study.

1. A sense of meaning to life is important for healthy and holistic functioning (Binns, 1980; Frankl, 1962; Jourard, 1971, 1974).
2. Meaning to life falls in the province of the spiritual nature of the human person (Binns, 1980; Frankl, 1962, 1966, 1984; Trice, 1983).
3. Activity related to meaning to life as well as consequences associated with having or not having a sense of meaning can be viewed as manifestations of the spiritual aspect of the human person (Binns, 1980; Frankl, 1966; Jourard, 1974; Trice, 1983).
4. An essential structure of a meaningful experience for the elderly exists and can be extracted from verbal descriptions of experiences perceived as meaningful by the elderly.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of the study, the following terms were defined.

1. Human spirit--that dimension of the human person manifesting through the pursuit of or the experiencing of meaning to life (Frankl, 1966). The human spirit consists of the four critical attributes of essence, vision, action, and zeal (Trice, 1983).

2. Elderly--any person age 65 years or older, who is able to discuss with the researcher a single experience from life through which or during which a sense of meaning to life was derived.

3. Essential structure of a meaningful experience--a description of the answer to the question of "what is essential for the experience to be described by the elderly as being a meaningful experience?" Meaningful experiences are not defined by the investigator but by the elderly person. Omery (1983) contended that this point is essential since a phenomenological investigator should have no preconceived operational definitions of the phenomenon of interest.

4. Meaningful experiences--any life experience perceived and described by the elderly person as

meaningful in the sense that during the experience the person had the sense that life was meaningful and had purpose.

5. Creative action category--experiences classified in the category deal with activities related to personal accomplishment. The experiences might deal with the individual's vocation, avocation, or the individual's idea of a calling, for example.

6. Experiential receptivity category--experiences classified in the category deal with what Frankl (1966) called "receptivity toward the world" (p. 43). Examples might be steeping the self in the beauty of nature; in love, as in love for another person; in prayerful communion with God; or perhaps in an exquisite rendition of a favorite symphony. Although activity is involved here, experiences coming under the category would be more passive than those under the previous category.

8. Attitude toward condition in life category--experiences classified in the category would deal with attitude, particularly attitude toward the restricting factor in life. For example, if an individual described an experience during which the individual chose to be cheerful, courageous, uncomplaining despite some dire

circumstance, as a meaningful experience, the experience would be classified into the category.

Limitations

The following limitations were recognized by the investigator prior to initiation of data collection.

1. Tape recording the interviews could possibly be a deterrent to open, honest communication.

2. Due to the difference in life expectancy, the overall population of elderly women is greater than is the overall population of elderly men. The sample may reflect the same disproportion of women to men.

Summary

Nurses have traditionally been interested in the entire human person--body, mind, and spirit. To date, the spiritual dimension has not been studied in the depth with which the other aspects of the human person have been studied. If nurses are to give spiritual care in the fullest sense of the term, the spiritual dimension must be explored and researched with the same care with which the psychological and physical dimensions have been and are continuing to be explored and researched. The goal of the study was to explore the manifestation of the human spirit in the elderly through identification of the essential

structure of an experience from life through which or during which the elderly had the sense that life was meaningful and had purpose.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature deals primarily with theory and research concerning meaning to life in general, meaning to life and the elderly, and meaning to life and nursing in order to establish the basis for the study designed to identify the essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly as a manifestation of the human spirit.

In discussing the work of George Herbert Mead, Natanson (1973) suggested that Mead viewed the human person as being separated from the purely animal by the ability to "pick out meanings in his responses and to indicate these meanings both to himself and to other selves" (p. 7). Further, meaning is seen as arising from and embodied in the process in which the individual and the environment are "integral polarities." Consciousness must include both the individual as well as the individual's environment (Natanson, 1973).

The suggestion has been made that the ability to discern meaning and to communicate the meaning, once discerned is a peculiarly human trait. The particular

meaning of import to the study at hand, that is meaning to life, is now discussed.

Meaning to Life

Stern (1971), a 20th-century philosopher, indicated that while the search for meaning is basic to the human person, there is a sense in which each person creates the frame of orientation through which meaning is derived. In addition, Stern stated that which gives meaning to one age (age in an historical sense) is not necessarily that which will provide meaning for another age. The dynamic quality of meaning could conceivably be applied to the individual. That is, that which gives meaning at one age or time of an individual's life may not necessarily be what provides meaning at another age or time in the individual's life.

Another philosopher, Murphy (1982), agreed with Stern (1971) on the search for meaning as being basic to human-kind. In addition, Murphy (1982) pointed out that a sense of meaning is very deeply rooted in feelings, in the "passionate nature" (p. 15) of the individual rather than in the intellect. Following the line of reasoning, Murphy went on to suggest that no amount of intellectual argument can restore, or remove for that matter, a sense of meaning. The emotions must be appealed to or involved.

Klinger's (1977) views are compatible with both of the previous views in relation to the basicness to the human person of a sense of meaning to life. Klinger also aligned with Frankl (1962, 1966) in suggesting that the consequences of a loss of meaning "penetrate the core of a person's being . . . wind themselves around all the fibers of body and soul . . . when the margin of survival has worn thin, they include life and death" (p. 3).

Speaking to the issue of whether or not meaning to life can be studied scientifically, Battista and Almond (1973) suggested several methods of study including the phenomenological approach. Briefly, the phenomenological approach embodies a methodology in which human experience is studied from the perspective of the individual. The purpose is to more fully understand both the structure and the meaning of human experience (Keen, 1975). The approach is discussed in more depth in chapter 3. Battista and Almond specified that the key to being able to study meaning to life lies in the manner in which the question to be studied is posed. Specifically, the authors advocated the asking of a question, such as "what are the conditions under which an individual will experience life as meaningful" as opposed to the more philosophical "what is the meaning of life" (p. 423). The

question of the current study which deals with determining the essential structure of a meaningful experience, specifically to the elderly, would seem to follow the authors' recommendation.

In accord with Battista and Almond's (1973) notion, Klinger (1977) asked 320 college students to respond to a questionnaire dealing with how meaningful the students found life (on a Likert-type scale) as well as identifying what in particular (in the students' own words) gave meaning to life. Klinger found that the majority of the answers to the question of what gave meaning to life listed either human relationships of some kind or goals that lay in the future. Further, Klinger concluded that while some of the incentives that provide meaning might be considered "remote and lofty," most of them were "everyday and homely" (p. 8).

In 1973, Garfield published a study in which Frankl's concept of existential vacuum (the result of losing the sense of meaning to life) across several subcultures was investigated. The groups studied included professional engineers, graduate students, members of a commune, and ghetto residents. The findings indicated that while the phenomenon was experienced in all of the subcultures included, it was not experienced in the same way.

Garfield's final conclusion was that if an investigator wished to know about an experience in a particular group, the investigator must study the group utilizing tools developed specifically for the group.

The literature presented thus far is relevant to the current study in a number of areas. To begin with, the importance of meaning to life to humankind in general and, therefore, to the elderly in particular is supported. Secondly, the major methodological approach chosen as well as the manner of posing the problem statement and research question are supported. Finally, the advisability of studying the particular portion of the population of concern without preconceived bias was recommended.

Meaning to Life and the Elderly

To further clarify the place of the study, the following literature dealing with the elderly in particular is presented. Neugarten (1973), speaking at the conference on successful aging held at Duke University in June, 1973, offered a 5-point measure of life satisfaction among the elderly. Two of Neugarten's points are particularly relevant to Frankl's (1966) theory: (a) the individual takes pleasure from whatever activity constitutes everyday life and (b) the individual regards the individual's own life as meaningful and takes

responsibility for what that life has been. From the two points presented may be deduced the fact that Neugarten (1973) believed that while life satisfaction cannot be equated with a sense of meaning to life, the latter is necessary in order for the former to be present.

Crumbaugh (1972) studied aging and adjustment by use of the Purpose-in-Life test. Crumbaugh stated that loss of meaning is a universal threat that occurs in the transition from the active occupational years to the more passive retirement years. Based on Crumbaugh's statement, the suspicion arises that losing meaning is perhaps an even greater threat to the elderly who must, for whatever reason, make an institution home.

In an essay, Anthony (1980) discussed Marxism and capitalism in terms of work, the importance of work in relation to meaning to life, and possible consequences of loss of work. Anthony noted that traditionally the individual has invested work with two important aspects of meaning. First, work is the means by which the individual establishes relationships, enters into society, and acquires or develops moral responsibility. Second, work is also the way in which the person sublimates individualism in order to acquire spiritual significance. In the essay is noted that industrialized societies are fast

getting to the point where, in some cases by virtue of the advance in technology, adult unemployment is growing as well as is delayed employment of the maturing adolescent. Anthony acknowledged the growing fear that such a withdrawal of work, so to speak, will bring about a state of perceived meaninglessness to life. While Anthony was speaking of society as a whole, the implications on an individual level of withdrawal of work, in terms of retirement from work roles whether the roles be inside or outside the home, can readily be seen.

In accord with previous assertions that a loss of meaning to life may, depending on the other circumstances in the individual's life, be considered a life and death matter (Frankl, 1962; Jourard, 1974; Klinger, 1977), the following information takes on added significance: suicide among the elderly, age 60 years and older, continues to be consistently higher than in younger age groups (Miller, 1979). In reviewing current research in geriatric suicide, Miller identified the need for research in the area of "forging more meaningful roles in late life" (p. 293). The present investigation may contribute some knowledge in the area.

Meaning to Life and Nursing

In relation to nursing, Valliot (1966) and Gadow (1980) described a philosophy for nursing in which a major responsibility of the nurse in caring for patients is to help the individuals become or continue to be authentic persons. An authentic person is an individual who "takes responsibility for personal action taken, accepts a full share of life with its attendant disappointments as well as joys, and seeks for meaning in existence" (Valliot, 1966, p. 504). Surely the responsibility extends to care of the aging for there is no reason to suspect that an individual no longer needs an authentic existence merely because the individual is elderly.

Writing in support of the holistic approach to health care, Griffin (1980) and Heller (1981) directed attention specifically to the elderly. Griffin (1980) stated flatly that "only through caring for the elderly holistically can their needs be met" (p. 196). Heller (1981) pointed out that the nurse must have an understanding of the basic needs of the elderly as a group in order to plan care for the elderly holistic or otherwise. Heller went on to describe many of the needs of the elderly and offered specific nursing interventions that might be appropriate. Such areas as nutrition, elimination, skin, hearing, and

pain were dealt with in a fair amount of detail. Psycho-social needs were dealt with in less detail but the nursing actions were still fairly specific, autonomous actions. Under spiritual care, Heller (1981) offered only two suggestions: the nurse should "channel requests for spiritual support and guidance . . . to the appropriate sources. . . [and] arrange for attendance at religious services if desired" (p. 25). There was no mention of meaning to life.

A final study pointed out even more graphically the apparent lack of attention to the spiritual area of meaning to life in dealing with the elderly. Magid and Rhys Hearn (1981) surveyed 7,561 geriatric patients to identify characteristics of geriatric patients and relate the characteristics to nursing needs and subsequent work load of the nurse. A great deal of attention was paid to such areas as toileting, dressing, personal hygiene, and other types of physical care. There was no consideration given to the psychosocial, let alone spiritual needs of the patients other than an allusion to the fact that confused patients contributed significantly to the work load.

The fact that the area of meaning to life along with attendant ramifications for nursing care was overlooked is

significant for two reasons. To begin with, to choose to overlook the area is to choose to view the patient in other than a holistic manner. To view the patient in other than a holistic manner is antithetical to current thinking in nursing. The second point, more relevant to the present investigation, is that the area may have been overlooked because up to the present time there has not existed an essential structure of what a meaningful experience to the elderly is that might be useful to the nurse in dealing with the issue of meaning to life in the elderly patient. The plausibility of the point is borne out by the failure of Heller (1981) to include the area, despite writing in support of the holistic approach as well as attempting to address the spiritual nature of the patient. The lack of knowledge in terms of the essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly is precisely the void that the present study planned to fill.

Summary

The literature presented supports that a sense of meaning to life is basic to humankind. In addition, meaning to life can be studied in a scientific manner if care is taken to pose the problem and the research question(s) in terms of the conditions under which meaning to life is

experienced rather than a more philosophical approach. Further, note has been taken of the fact that a sense of meaning to life is not only important to the elderly but that the elderly are a group that are at-risk for losing the sense of meaning. Finally, the connection has been made between nursing's responsibility to foster authenticity, a major portion of which is the search for meaning, in all patients including the elderly; the limited reference to spiritual care in general and care related to fostering a sense of meaning to life in particular; and the fact that prior to the present time, knowledge concerning what constitutes the essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly as a manifestation of the human spirit has not existed.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURE FOR COLLECTION AND TREATMENT OF DATA

There are a growing number of researchers in nursing as well as other disciplines who suggest that the nature and use of the knowledge sought should dictate the research approach chosen: a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach, or a combination of the two (Cook & Reichardt, 1979; Price & Barrell, 1980; Simms, 1981; Swanson & Chenitz, 1982). In accord with this notion as well as with the stated purposes of the study, a combination of both a qualitative and quantitative approach was utilized.

The qualitative approach utilized in the study was the phenomenological approach. Edmund Husserl is generally considered to be one of the leaders in the development of phenomenology both as a philosophy and as a method of conducting scientific inquiry (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Spiegelberg, 1971, 1975; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974; Wagner, 1983). Husserl's method expanded the use of the term experience beyond what can be known by the senses to anything of which the individual can be aware or conscious (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

Three terms were used somewhat interchangeably by Husserl: (a) the phenomenological reduction, (b) the phenomenological epoche, and (c) bracketing. To speak of reducing a complex situation, problem, or phenomenon to the basic or essential elements as a method of understanding the entity is to suggest narrowing the focus of the researcher so that all that is superfluous is ignored. In a phenomenological reduction, what is ignored are all notions or judgements previously held by the researcher regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The hope is that in so doing an understanding will be gained of the true nature of the phenomenon being investigated (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974; Valle & King, 1978).

The word epoche is taken from the Greek and refers to a suspension of judgement. The phenomenological epoche then refers again to the conscious setting aside of previous beliefs concerning an entity or phenomenon while attempting to study the phenomenon. Bracketing is another term used by Husserl to refer to the setting aside of the investigator's previously-held beliefs regarding an entity before attempting to study the entity (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Important to note is that Husserl did not suggest that previous notions concerning a phenomenon under investigation should be denied but merely that the notions

should be set aside, so to speak, in order that the researcher might view the phenomenon in as open a manner as possible (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

In speaking of bracketing, the point should be made that the individual would not be able to bracket everything since human consciousness itself cannot be bracketed. The portion remaining following bracketing was referred to by Husserl as the ego. Another important point to note is that Husserl did not subscribe to the subject-object dualism of past philosophers but contended that the cogito (I think) cannot be separated from the cogitationes (thoughts) (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). The word noesis (mental perception or thought) was chosen by Husserl to represent the activity of consciousness, while noema (that which is perceived, a perception or a thought) was chosen to represent the essence to which the mental activity is correlated. Again, Husserl was not speaking of subject-object but contended that noetic activity deals not with psychic processes but with the meaning of the processes. In the same manner, the noematic does not refer to the empirical object nor to the physical experience but to the meaning of the experience (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

Husserl and phenomenologists maintain that an entity or phenomenon as given to consciousness is the essence of the entity or phenomenon as experienced empirically. Further, the essence of an entity is referred to as the *eidos*, and the suggestion is made that the knowability of a phenomenon resides in the knowability of the *eidos* of the phenomenon (Gurwitsch, 1964; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Spiegelberg, 1975; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

The notion of imaginative variation comes into play as a means of demonstrating that the *eidos* is indeed an insight into the essence of a phenomenon. If, for example, a particular object such as a tree were to be dealt with, the individual would have not only an empirical impression of the particular tree in question but also some insight into the *eidos* of what a tree is. Having arrived at the above point, the individual could vary the perspective of the tree by introducing experiences with other trees of different shapes and sizes. If the individual could still retain the *eidos* tree to which the individual could refer all other specific trees, the notion that the *eidos* tree was indeed an insight into the essence of the phenomenon tree would be supported (Keen, 1975; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

The phenomenological methodology is particularly appropriate to the study of many of the phenomena about which nursing is concerned (Davis, 1978; Knaack, 1984; Oiler, 1982). Phenomena such as sorrow, loneliness, hope, caring, pain, or the experiencing of meaning to life, are all legitimate human experiences. However, at least in the initial stages of investigation, the phenomena do not lend themselves readily to an empirical form of inquiry that requires that data gathered must be in the form of quantifiable, so-called hard data. For example, suppose a researcher were to gather such quantifiable data concerning loneliness as the number of people in a given geographical area who experienced loneliness during a specified period of time, the number of separate episodes of loneliness experienced by each individual and the length of each episode. The researcher would then be able to discuss such aspects of loneliness as the incidence in a given area, the average number of episodes per individual, and the average length of each episode. However, the researcher would be no closer to identifying what actually constitutes an episode of loneliness than when the study began. To arrive at the essence of loneliness or *eidos* loneliness, loneliness must be studied from the standpoint of the lived-experience of loneliness.

The problem of the present study was to determine the essential structure of a life experience through which or during which the elderly derive a sense of meaning to life as a manifestation of the human spirit. In addition, the data gathered were utilized to answer the following research question: Can the experiences described as meaningful by the elderly be placed into one of the three categories suggested by Frankl (1966)? The study was compatible with the factor searching category of research as defined by Diers (1979). The problem statement was compatible with Diers' notion that the object of factor-searching studies is "to devise or invent labels . . . [to] usefully characterize . . . a given situation" (p. 100). The research question dealt specifically with the categories developed by Frankl (1966) as the categories into which meaningful experiences may be classified. If the data did not support that the categories were the categories into which meaningful experiences may be classified, then new labels for the new categories that came to light would be invented.

As noted earlier, since the problem of the study dealt with life experiences perceived as meaningful by the elderly, an appropriate methodology would be a methodology which attempts to study human experience as lived

experience. This would be a phenomenological approach (Keen, 1975; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Wagner, 1983). Omery (1983) suggested that the phenomenological approach will not only allow the investigator to describe the structure of the experience but will also allow for investigation of the meaning of the experience. The latter aspect is especially important since, as Oiler (1982) pointed out, labeling alone does not adequately describe a situation in terms of meaning.

Setting

Elderly individuals were interviewed by the investigator to gather data for the present study. The actual source of the participants included community organizations which include senior citizens in the membership and referrals from professional associates of the investigator. The town is located in North Texas and has a population of 60,000. One participant came from a town in northwest Florida, with a population of 25,000.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of 50 persons who meet in senior citizen organizations, churches, other community organizations including senior citizens in the membership or are referred to the investigator by classmates or other professional associates of the investigator. Voluntary

participation was solicited. The sample of 11 was an availability sample. Persons were interviewed until common concepts or themes emerged.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study was submitted to the Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects of the Texas Woman's University. Permission from the committee was obtained before collection of data was begun (Appendix A).

Each prospective participant was informed verbally of the purpose of the study and the nature of expected participation in the study (Appendix B). If the participant volunteered and agreed to allow the interview to be tape-recorded, prior to the interview, written consent forms were presented to be read and signed (Appendix C). The participant's name was not used on the typed transcript of the interview. Once transcribed, the tape recordings of the interviews were erased. Names and addresses of participants were maintained until validation of formulated meanings had been completed and results of the study had been shared with participants interested in knowing the results. Names and addresses were then destroyed. No names were used in the reporting of findings.

Instruments

Two instruments were used for data collection in the study. The first was a Demographic Data Questionnaire (Appendix D) developed by the investigator. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about age, gender, race, occupation, marital status, number of children, proximity of significant others, and current living arrangements. The data obtained from the questionnaire were used to describe the sample.

The second instrument used in the study was an investigator-developed interview schedule (Appendix E). The interview schedule was designed to elicit as full a description as possible of a single experience from life through which or during which the participant had the sense that life was meaningful and had purpose.

Regarding reliability, Leininger (1985) submitted that reliability in qualitative research focuses on the identification and documentation of recurrent, accurate, and consistent features, patterns, values, meanings, or themes pertaining to the phenomenon of interest. Further, Leininger contended that in qualitative research, validity refers to the gaining of knowledge about and an understanding of the true nature, essence, meanings, attributes, and characteristics of a particular phenomenon

under study. Two measures were taken in regard to reliability and validity. A sample protocol along with the significant statements extracted from the protocol and the formulated meanings of the statements was submitted to two other investigators experienced in phenomenological methods for validation. In addition, the investigator was able to contact four of the participants to validate the formulated meanings of significant statements.

Data Collection

After an explanation of the purpose and goals of the study (Appendix B) and the obtaining of a formal signed consent to participate (Appendix C), an interview was conducted by the investigator. The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit as full a description as possible of a single experience from life perceived as meaningful to the participant. An attempt was made to elicit as much information about the experience as possible, including setting, characters involved, feelings, and emotions. Care was taken not to attempt clarification as such during the interview, so as not to put words into the mouth of the participant, so to speak (Omery, 1983). If permission to do so was given, interviews were tape-recorded. Interviews rather than written descriptions were chosen because of the belief on

the part of the investigator that a more complete description could be elicited through an interview than might be possible in a written description. Demographic data were obtained, including age, gender, race, occupation, marital status, number of children, proximity of children, and current living arrangements.

Treatment of Data

Following collection of the data, each interview was transcribed verbatim and a detailed analysis was done using the following technique developed by Colaizzi (1978).

1. Read all of the participants' descriptions in order to acquire a feel for them.
2. Return to each transcript and extract from it phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon, known as extracting significant statements. Repetitions, if found, can be eliminated.
3. Spell out the meaning of each significant statement, known as formulating meanings. Formulating meanings is a difficult step because it involves moving from what the participants say to what the participants mean. Care must be taken that the meanings arrived at do not sever the connection with the original description. The formulations must discover and illuminate the meanings hidden

in the various contexts and horizons of the phenomenon which are present in the original descriptions.

4. Following completion of step 3, the investigator of the present study returned to the participants to validate that the formulated meanings were the actual meanings intended by the participants.

5. Repeat the process for each description and organize the aggregate formulated meanings into clusters of themes. The attempt here is to allow for the emergence of themes which are common to all of the participants' descriptions.

(a) Refer these clusters of themes back to the original descriptions in order to validate the themes. Ask whether there is anything in the original that is not accounted for in the clusters of themes and whether the themes propose anything which is not in the original. If either of the above are true, a re-examination is necessary.

(b) Discrepancies may be noted among and/or between the various clusters; some themes may flatly contradict other themes or may appear to be totally unrelated to other themes. The investigator must rely upon a tolerance for ambiguity; the investigator must proceed with the solid conviction that what is

logically inexplicable may be existentially real and valid.

6. The results of everything so far are integrated into an exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon.

7. The essential structure of the investigated phenomenon is considered to be embodied in the exhaustive description arrived at in step 6 (Colaizzi, 1978).

In addition to the content analysis, each transcript was examined to detect if the experience as a unit could be classified into one of the three categories theorized by Frankl (1966) as being those through which meaning to life can be realized.

Pilot Study

In preparation for the dissertation, a pilot study was conducted in order to bring to light problems in participant availability and recruitment, and data collection and analysis in order for these problems to be dealt with prior to the beginning of the major study. The pilot sample consisted of 5 persons. Because the results of the data analysis of the pilot study were so closely aligned to the results of the data analysis of the major study, the data from the pilot study were dealt with along with the data from the major study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The sample is described, followed by a description of each participant's narrative of an experience during which or through which the participant derived a sense that life was meaningful. Examples of the data as were analyzed according to Colaizzi's (1978) seven steps for analyzing phenomenological protocols are presented. The descriptive identification of the basic structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly is presented based on an analysis of the data base as a whole rather than separating the data into male and female portions. Finally, each experience as a unit is classified into the categories postulated by Frankl (1966) as the categories into which meaningful experiences may be grouped. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings of the study.

Description of the Sample

A total of 24 individuals were approached for possible participation in the study. Eleven of the 24

agreed to participate. Nine of the participants were female; two were male. The ages of the participants ranged from 65 to 87 years, with a median of 69. All nine of the females had been married, six were living with spouses at the time of the interview, two were widowed, and one was divorced. Both of the males were married and living with spouses at the time of the interview. Three of the females were employed outside of the home with two of the three working part-time and one full-time. One of the males was employed, the other was retired. Although 10 of the participants had living children, only 6 of the 10 had children living close enough that the children visited with the participants on a frequent basis. All 11 participants lived independently in private homes or apartments at the time of the interview. The demographic data are presented graphically in Table 1.

Findings

The phenomenon of interest in the study was the essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly as a manifestation of the human spirit. Each of the participants was asked if the interview could be taped. Seven of the 11 participants agreed to allow the interview to be tape-recorded. Each tape-recording was

Table 1

Demographic Data of Sample

Subject	Gender	Age	Race	Marital Status	No. of Children	Proximity of Children
1	Female	87	White	Married	2	Close
2	Female	70	White	Widowed	2	Close
3	Female	67	White	Married	3	Far
4	Female	76	White	Widowed	1	Close
5	Female	68	White	Married	0	N/A
6	Female	69	White	Married	3	Far
7	Female	68	White	Married	2	Far
8	Female	73	White	Married	2	Close
9	Male	71	White	Married	3	Far
10	Female	69	White	Divorced	3	Close
11	Male	65	White	Married	3	Close

transcribed verbatim. The interviews not taped were transcribed as soon after the interview as possible from notes taken during the interview. A sample of a transcribed interview may be found in Appendix F.

The following are the experiences from life described by the participants as experiences through which or during which a sense of meaning was derived.

1. Participant 1 described a time when the participant had been abandoned by the participant's husband with one small child while pregnant with another child. The participant was forced to return to the home of the participant's parents for a time until able to obtain a job as a store clerk and move into an apartment with the two children. Throughout the narrative, the participant emphasized that the term "can't" must never be used; that a person must never give up and say, "Oh, I can't do that" but rather say, "I can work it out, I'm sure." The participant described the feeling associated with a sense of meaning to life as being one of "I know I can go along and make the best of things."

2. Participant 2 described an experience of caring for a relative (brother-in-law) who was in the latter stages of a terminal illness. The participant was, at the time of the interview, preparing to move to the home of the brother-in-law in order to care for the relative. The participant described having "tried it out" for a 6-week period before deciding to make the move and coming to the conclusion that the participant was indeed helpful to the

relative, that the participant was "good for him." The participant described the feeling associated with a sense of meaning as "you feel better when you're productive, when you have a goal and you're working toward something, and you're helping someone."

3. Participant 3 described a situation in which the participant had activated a prayer chain to pray for a young woman who was not expected to live. The participant had become aware of the young woman's illness because the participant's husband had been asked to counsel the dying woman's family. The young woman did not die. Three weeks later, the young woman walked into a meeting at which the participant was in attendance. The participant described feeling satisfaction at the realization that "God was showing us not only that He answered prayer, but how well He answered prayer." The participant described the feeling associated with a sense of meaning as being "the opposite of depression" and "the knowledge that you're doing something worthwhile."

The same participant described a second experience in which the participant had experienced a mutual caring relationship with another person, a fellow worker. The relationship seemed to have grown out of adversity.

4. Participant 4 described the experience of holding the participant's only child for the first time and realizing that the participant was the child's protector, had the responsibility for the child, and could look forward to raising the child.

The participant also described two other experiences: (a) teaching Sunday School to 11-12-year-olds because "that's a crucial age for them to be learning the Bible and what it means" and (b) caring for a grandchild for a 2-year period because the child "had a problem." The participant described the feeling associated with a sense of meaning as being "a good feeling," a feeling of "being needed."

5. Participant 5 stated that every experience was meaningful because "there is a reason for everything." When asked for a specific experience, the participant related a recent severe illness of the participant's husband during which the participant attended the husband almost constantly for about 3 weeks. The participant stated that the husband had told someone that "if it hadn't have been for her, I would have died." The participant described the feeling associated with a sense of meaning as one of "being instrumental in helping someone."

6. Participant 6, a former school teacher, described an incident in which a student was fighting in class as a result of racial tension. The participant took the child from the room ostensibly to punish the child. The participant perceived a need on the part of the child to feel understood and cared for as a person. The participant chose to meet the need, stating, "I put my arm around her and became her friend." When asked to describe the feelings associated with feeling that life was meaningful, the participant responded that "without purpose and without meaning, everything get very dull and depressing."

7. The participant described the experience of being in the hospital, having a baby, and knowing that the participant's husband had been shot down (the experience occurred during World War II) but not knowing whether or not the husband was alive. The participant was feeling very depressed and "down." Upon hearing that the husband was alive and a prisoner of war, the participant had the sense that life was worthwhile, that "this wasn't the end of the world, that we're going to go on from here and make the best of every day." The participant became aware that "I had a baby to raise, with or without a daddy." The participant described the feeling associated with a sense

of meaning to life as elation, as "get up and get out of this bed and get on with life!"

8. The participant described an experience during which the participant and the participant's husband helped another couple adopt a baby. The help given was quite extensive, including visiting adoption agencies on the other couple's behalf (the other couple did not live in the United States at the time). The participant noted that being able to help the other couple was what made the experience one through which the participant derived a sense of meaningfulness to life.

9. The participant described the experience of being involved in the work of setting up and maintaining the Emergency Alert Response System in the participant's community. The participant expressed initial concern over the usefulness of the program and the participant's part in the program, since the clients involved had no need to make use of the devices during the first 2 years of the program. However, once the system began being used in emergency situations, the participant noted that the system was indeed useful and that "in this particular instance, I felt that maybe there was some purpose in my existence."

The participant described two other experiences which were career related. In both instances, the participant perceived the need for a new educational program and was instrumental in the initiation and conduction of the program. The participant stated that the feelings associated with the experiences during which the participant had the sense that life was meaningful were no different than any other situation. In the same context, the participant noted that there was only one time during the participant's life that the participant could recall "twiddling my thumbs" and "having time on my hands."

10. The participant described a time shortly after a daughter had committed suicide. The participant was grieving "intensely" when the participant sensed an inner voice, described as the Holy Spirit, tell the participant that the daughter was "happy and perfectly all right." The participant experienced a strong feeling of being loved by God and a direction from God to "help others." The participant then described actively seeking to be of help to others, relating anecdotes from volunteer work at the hospital as well as from experiences of helping friends and acquaintances. The participant observed that "no matter what age a person is, young or old, there are always places where you can help." The feeling associated

with a sense of meaning to life was described as one of joy.

11. The participant described deriving a sense of meaning to life in two areas. The participant was a professional plasterer and tile setter and took pleasure in "driving by a job that I've done 20 or 30 years ago." In addition, the participant described working with young people and helping them get started in the profession as an activity that the participant had been involved in throughout the participant's professional life. The participant related that at the time the participant was first starting in the profession, the older craftsmen were "jealous of their trades and would hardly give a young man a chance." The participant described the activity of helping young people get started in the profession as "putting a meaning to your life." The feeling associated with a sense of meaning to life was described by the participant as pride of accomplishment.

Each transcript was read through completely to get a feel for the experience. Significant statements relating to the phenomenon of interest were then extracted and repetitions were eliminated. A sample of significant statements is found in Table 2. A complete listing of all significant statements can be found in Appendix G.

Table 2

Sample of Significant Statements

Statement
1. Without purpose and without meaning, everything gets very dull and depressing.
2. Spent 20 years teaching and loved my subject.
3. Best experiences were with students as people, not as people I was trying to get to absorb my subject.
4. First teaching experience was on the border at the time when the Mexican-Americans were just beginning to be resentful of the rest of us.
5. Had a little Mexican-American girl in class--we'd always gotten along fine.
6. One day she blew up and it had to do with this business of her being Mexican-American.
7. She was fighting the Anglos.
8. I took her out of the class and she thought I was going to punish her exceedingly because she really deserved it.
9. I put my arm around her and became her friend.
10. Experiences like that meant so much.
11. When I could get close to a student, get underneath their skin a little bit and make them feel I was interested in them, that was one of the best experiences when I was a teacher or in my life.

After reflection on the statements and on the experience as an entity, the formulated meanings of the statements were derived. An example of formulated

Table 3

Sample of Formulated Meanings

Statement
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feelings associated with not having a sense that life is meaningful are a sense of dullness and depression. The inference is that having a sense of meaning to life would provide the opposite sensations or feelings. 2. The participant was a teacher by profession but viewed experiences with pupils as individuals, as "people," as more meaningful than the teaching itself. 3. The participant's first teaching experience was during the time when racial tension between Anglo-Americans and Mexican-Americans was beginning to occur. An incident occurred in the classroom between a Mexican-American child and some Anglo-American children. 4. The Mexican-American child was perceived to be in the wrong, and, therefore, deserving of punishment. The perception was held by both the child and the participant. The participant perceived a need in the child for the participant to be understanding, to "be a friend." The participant chose to meet the need rather than to punish the child. 5. Choosing to meet the child's need to be understood and to feel that the participant was interested in the child as a person and not just as a student was the experience from which the participant derived a sense of meaning.

meanings can be found in Table 3. The entire list of formulated meanings is found in Appendix H.

The formulated meanings were examined for clusters of common themes. The common themes which emerged from the

data along with statements explicating them are found in Table 4.

One theme not included in the list of common themes, because the theme did not appear universally, is, nevertheless, worthy of mention because of how often the theme did appear. The theme is the notion of God or a higher being or church. In 8 of the 11 descriptions, there was some mention of God or a higher being or church as either a part of the meaningful experience or as directing or providing the experience.

Following identification of common themes, the original descriptions were returned to in order to validate that the themes were indeed to be found in each of the descriptions and to insure that all common themes had been identified. An exhaustive description of the phenomenon was produced by the integration of the results of the analysis. The description of a meaningful experience is a statement of the essential structure. The exhaustive description of a meaningful experience is presented in Table 5.

Classification of Experiences into Frankl's Categories

Frankl (1966) suggested three broad areas into which experiences through which or during which individuals

Table 4

Clusters of Common Themes

Theme	Statement
Concern for others	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each experience involved a concern for others. 2. In two descriptions, the experience of feeling that life was meaningful occurred following a deliberate refocusing of attention from self to others. 3. In at least five descriptions, there is a sense in which the concern for others was placed above concern for self.
Helpfulness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each experience involved a perception on the part of the participant that the participant was helpful or useful to or needed by the "other" for whom the participant was concerned. 2. In seven of the experiences, the notion of being helpful, useful, or needed is explicit, with the terms actually being a part of the narrative. The notion is implicit in the other four experiences.
Action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each experience involved a perception on the part of the participant that the participant had taken action or was going to take action or be involved in activity that was helpful or useful to the "other" for whom the participant was concerned.
Positive- ness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The overall feeling or emotional overtone was one of positiveness. 2. The positiveness extended to feelings about the self as a person as well as about the positiveness or worthwhileness of the "helping" activity in which the participant was involved.

Table 5

Exhaustive Description of a Meaningful Experience to the
Elderly

An experience during which or through which an elderly person has the sense that life is meaningful is as follows: An experience during which the individual involved performs an activity perceived as needed by, helpful to, or useful to another person or group. Important to the generation of a sense of meaningfulness is the perception on the part of the individual that the individual is performing an activity that is worthwhile; that it is helpful, useful, or needed; and that it does "make a difference" to the individual or group on whose behalf the activity is performed. A sense of positiveness pervades the experience both in terms of feelings about self as well as feelings about the activity.

experience a sense of meaning to life may be placed. The first category is one of creative action. The category encompasses such activities as the individual's duties in relation to job or work role and to family. The emphasis is on the how rather than the what. That is, emphasis is

not on the importance of the individual's job in the world's eyes but rather on how the individual performs that job.

The second category is that of experiential receptivity, or what Frankl (1966) called "receptivity toward the world" (p. 43). An example might be the meaning that can be experienced by steeping the self in the beauty of nature or in prayerful communion with God or in a relationship, such as a love relationship with another person, or perhaps in an exquisite rendition of a favorite symphony.

The third category into which experiences related to meaning to life may be placed deals with attitude, specifically the individual's attitude toward condition or lot in life. In particular, this refers to the attitude toward the restricting factors in life. In this manner, even individuals faced with catastrophe, such as individuals perhaps who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, can still experience meaning to life by the manner in which the catastrophe is borne.

When considered as a unit, a number of the experiences of the participants in the study could be classified quite readily into the category of creative action. The experiences of participants 2 and 5, dealing

with caring for relatives who were ill; the first experience of participant 3 who activated a prayer chain on behalf of a young woman who was very ill; the experiences of participant 4 of looking forward to caring for a new child, of teaching a Sunday School class for children, and of caring for a grandchild for a 2-year period; the experience of participant 6 of recognizing and meeting the need of a student for understanding rather than for punishment; the experience of participant 8 of helping another couple adopt a child; the experiences of participant 9 of helping set up the Emergency Alert Response System program and helping initiate the two educational programs; and the experiences of participant 11 of taking pleasure in seeing that work done many years before had been done well and was, therefore, still standing and of helping young people learn the crafts of plastering and tile setting were all classified into the category of creative action.

The second experience of participant 3 involving a close relationship with a fellow employee that had grown out of adversity would seem to fit within the second category of experiential receptivity. There was helping action involved in that the participant had to take the other employee aside and explain how the other employee's behavior was affecting the work situation in a negative

manner. However, the participant seemed to derive particular meaning from the relationship with the fellow employee that had developed, the participant believed, in spite of the fact that the participant had to correct the other employee. Because the relationship seemed to inspire meaning, the experience was placed into the experiential receptivity category.

The remaining experiences, which include the experience of participant 1 of striving and succeeding in moving out of the participant's parents' home to raise two children as a single parent because to do otherwise would not have been considered by the participant as fair to the parents; the experience of participant 7 of realizing that "life must go on" and that the participant had a child in need of a mother "with or without a daddy"; and the experience of participant 10 of seeking to help others because the participant believed God had given that direction to the participant were all classified into the attitude toward condition in life category. The categorization was made because in each description an attitude toward life was expressed and then emphasized throughout the narrative.

In the case of participant 1, the attitude was one of "you never say 'I can't do that'" but rather "I can work

it out, I'm sure." Participant 7 described a feeling of "elation, of get up and get out of bed and get on with life." The participant noted that during subsequent trying experiences, the experience described for the study would be invoked along with the feeling of "get on with life" resulting in the participant being able to indeed "get on with life." Participant 10 described a number of anecdotes dealing with helping others. The notion of helping others as a way of life, hence as an attitude toward life, was suggested in the narrative, particularly by statements such as "no matter what age a person is, young or old, there are always places where you can help." The classification of all the experiences described in the study can be found in Table 6.

Summary of Findings

The following is a summary list of the findings of the study.

1. The essential structure of a meaningful experience was found to include the common themes of concern for others, helpfulness, action, and positiveness. The description of a meaningful experience is a statement of the essential structure and is considered to be embodied in the exhaustive description of a meaningful experience.

Table 6

Experiences Classified According to Frankl's Categories

Category	Experience
Creative action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Caring for a sick relative (participants 2 and 5). 2. Activating a prayer chain on behalf of another (first experience of participant 3). 3. Looking forward to caring for a new child (first experience of participant 4). 4. Teaching a Sunday School class for children (second experience of participant 4). 5. Caring for a grandchild for a 2-year period (third experience of participant 4). 6. Recognizing and meeting the need of a student for understanding rather than for punishment (participant 6). 7. Helping another couple adopt a child (participant 8). 8. Helping set up the Emergency Alert Response System program (first experience of participant 9). 9. Helping initiate two educational programs (second and third experiences of participant 9).

table continues

Category	Experience
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Taking pleasure in seeing that work done many years before had been done well and was, therefore, still standing (first experience of participant 11). 11. Helping young people learn the crafts of plastering and tile setting (second experience of participant 11).
Experiential recipti- vity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having a close relationship with a fellow employee that had grown out of adversity (second experience of participant 3).
Attitude toward condition in life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Striving and succeeding in moving out of the participant's parents' home to raise two children as a single parent because to do otherwise would not have been considered by the participant as fair to the parents (participant 1). 2. Realizing that "life must go on" and that the participant had a child in need of a mother "with or without a daddy" (participant 7). 3. Seeking to help others because the participant believed God had given that direction to the participant (participant 10).

The exhaustive description of an experience during which or through which an elderly person has the sense that life is meaningful is as follows: An experience during which the individual involved performs an activity perceived as

needed by, helpful to, or useful to another person or group. Important to the generation of a sense of meaningfulness is the perception on the part of the individual that the individual is performing an activity that is worthwhile, that it is helpful, useful, or needed, that it does "make a difference" to the individual or group on whose behalf the activity is performed. A sense of positiveness pervades the experience both in terms of feelings about self as well as feelings about the activity.

2. An additional theme not included in the list of common themes because the theme did not appear universally is the notion of God or a higher being or church. In 8 of the 11 descriptions, there was some mention of God or a higher being or church as either a part of the meaningful experience or as directing or providing the experience.

3. Each description was considered as a unit and classified into the three categories suggested by Frankl (1966) as being the categories into which meaningful experiences may be placed. Frankl's categories include the creative action category, the experiential receptivity category, and the attitude toward condition in life category.

The experiences were categorized as follows: The experiences of participants 2 and 5 dealing with caring for relatives who were ill; the first experience of participant 3 who activated a prayer chain on behalf of a young woman who was very ill; the experiences of participant 4 of looking forward to caring for a new child, of teaching a Sunday School class for children, and of caring for a grandchild for a 2-year period; the experience of participant 6 of recognizing and meeting the need of a student for understanding rather than for punishment; the experience of participant 8 of helping another couple adopt a child; the experiences of participant 9 of helping set up the Emergency Alert Response System program and helping initiate the two educational programs; and the experiences of participant 11 of taking pleasure in seeing that work done many years before had been done well and was, therefore, still standing and of helping young people learn the crafts of plastering and tile setting were all classified into the category of creative action.

The second experience of participant 3 involved a close relationship with a fellow employee that had grown out of adversity. Although the experience also involved helping activity, the participant seemed to derive particular meaning from the relationship itself. The

experience was, therefore, placed into the experiential receptivity category.

The remaining experiences, which include the experience of participant 1 of striving and succeeding in moving out of the participant's parents' home to raise two children as a single parent because to do otherwise would not have been considered by the participant as fair to the parents; the experience of participant 7 of realizing that "life must go on" and that the participant had a child in need of a mother "with or without a daddy"; and the experience of participant 10 of seeking to help others because the participant believed God had given that direction to the participant were all classified into the attitude toward condition in life category. The categorization was deemed appropriate because in each description an attitude toward life was expressed and then emphasized throughout the narrative.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The problem of the study was to determine the essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly as a manifestation of the human spirit. In addition, the data were utilized to answer the research question: Can the experiences described as meaningful by the elderly be placed into one of the three categories suggested by Frankl (1966)? Chapter 5 summarizes the findings. Conclusions are provided, implications for nursing identified, and recommendations for further study are offered.

Summary

The aim of the study was to describe the essential structure of a meaningful experience to the elderly from the standpoint of the elderly themselves--the eidos, so to speak, of meaningful experience to the elderly. The phenomenological approach, specifically because the approach is one of studying human experience as lived-experience in an attempt to discover meaning was

infinitely appropriate (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Wagner, 1983).

Eleven participants (nine female, two male) were interviewed concerning any experience from life during which or through which the individual had the sense that life was meaningful. Seven of the 11 agreed to have the interview taped. The transcriptions were analyzed according to Colaizzi's (1978) method with the data being treated as a whole rather than separating males and females. The study results were as follows:

1. The essential structure of a meaningful experience was found to include the common themes of concern for others, helpfulness, action, and positiveness. The description of a meaningful experience is a statement of the essential structure and is considered to be embodied in the exhaustive description of a meaningful experience. The exhaustive description of an experience during which or through which an elderly person has the sense that life is meaningful is as follows: An experience during which the individual involved performs an activity perceived as needed by, helpful to, or useful to another person or group. Important to the generation of a sense of meaningfulness is the perception on the part of the individual that the individual is performing an activity that is

worthwhile, that it is helpful, useful, or needed, that it does "make a difference" to the individual or group on whose behalf the activity is performed. A sense of positiveness pervades the experience both in terms of feelings about self as well as feelings about the activity.

2. An additional theme not included in the list of common themes because the theme did not appear universally is the notion of God or a higher being or church. In 8 of the 11 descriptions, there was some mention of God or a higher being or church as either a part of the meaningful experience or as directing or providing the experience.

3. Each description was considered as a unit and classified into the three categories suggested by Frankl (1966) as being the categories into which meaningful experiences may be placed. Frankl's categories include the creative action category, the experiential receptivity category, and the attitude toward condition in life category.

The experiences were categorized as follows: The experiences of participants 2 and 5 dealing with caring for relatives who were ill; the first experience of participant 3 who activated a prayer chain on behalf of a young woman who was very ill; the experiences of participant 4

of looking forward to caring for a new child, of teaching a Sunday School class for children, and of caring for a grandchild for a 2-year period; the experience of participant 6 of recognizing and meeting the need of a student for understanding rather than for punishment; the experience of participant 8 of helping another couple adopt a child; the experiences of participant 9 of helping set up the Emergency Alert Response System program and helping initiate the two educational programs; and the experiences of participant 11 of taking pleasure in seeing that work done many years before had been done well and was, therefore, still standing and of helping young people learn the crafts of plastering and tile setting were all classified into the category of creative action.

The second experience of participant 3 involved a close relationship with a fellow employee that had grown out of adversity. Although the experience also involved helping activity, the participant seemed to derive particular meaning from the relationship itself. The experience was, therefore, placed into the experiential receptivity category.

The remaining experiences, which include the experience of participant 1 of striving and succeeding in moving out of the participant's parents' home to raise two

children as a single parent because to do otherwise would not have been considered by the participant as fair to the parents; the experience of participant 7 of realizing that "life must go on" and that the participant had a child in need of a mother "with or without a daddy"; and the experience of participant 10 of seeking to help others because the participant believed God had given that direction to the participant were all classified into the attitude toward condition in life category. The categorization was deemed appropriate because in each description an attitude toward life was expressed and then emphasized throughout the narrative.

Discussion of Findings

The experiences all contained a concern for others rather than self. Particularly striking were the two experiences in which the sense that life was meaningful came after the focus of the individual was changed from self to other (the experiences of participants 7 and 10). In some cases, the concern for other(s) seemed to be placed above concern for self. The notion was evident in the case of the participant who described being a young mother who, with one small child and another one on the way, was forced to move back in with parents. Despite the fact that the episode must have occurred (from the age of

the participant) either just prior to or during the depression years, when attempting to live as a single parent and support independently two small children was not only not the norm but also very difficult, the participant chose to do so. The participant deemed that to do otherwise was "not fair to them (parents)," with no mention of what was or was not fair to the participant.

The notion of others above self was also apparent in cases such as the experiences of the elderly women caring for sick relatives. One planned to interrupt personal sleep patterns on a routine basis in order to care for the ill relative (had in fact done so during a 6-week "trial run") with no apparent concern for the affect the behavior would have on self. The other participant had attended a sick spouse on almost a 24-hour basis for several weeks, "camping out on the floor of the waiting room" at night. No mention was made of the affect the camping out had on the individual, well into the 6th decade of life at the time, or indeed that the behavior should even be considered out of the ordinary.

The same idea of others above self although not so graphically illustrated was perhaps implied in such experiences as the description of the craftsman who deliberately chose to show young people the trade despite

the norm at the time of established craftsmen fearing that to do so would mean that the established craftsman giving such help would soon be out of a job; or perhaps in the experience of the school teacher who placed a child's need for understanding above the teacher's need to discipline the child in order to prevent future infractions of a similar nature.

The perception on the part of the participant of actually having been of help or of being needed or of being useful was an important one. For instance, consider the participant who described having played an important role in setting up the Emergency Alert Response System but did not deem the experience a meaningful one until the usefulness of the program was actually demonstrated. Also important to note here is that each description included action on the part of the participant. In each case, the participant acted to meet a need, give help, or do something perceived as useful.

The overall feeling tone described by the participants as being present during an experience in which was felt the sense that life was meaningful was a positive one. The positiveness was present even in those experiences that contained an element of tragedy or near tragedy. Many of the participants had difficulty putting

words to the feelings experienced. Those who were able to, often used phrases or words denoting superlative forms of feeling, such as joy and elation. Some participants were able to express the feelings associated with not having the sense that life was meaningful. Again, the feelings were often expressed in superlatives such as "the most awful feeling" and "very depressing." The inference was that the feelings associated with having the sense that life was meaningful would be the opposite. Even the participants who had difficulty expressing feelings in words demonstrated a positive feeling tone with facial expressions. Many of the participants once into the descriptions, were very animated, with twinkling eyes and frequent large smiles of the ear-to-ear variety. The superlative nature of the feelings expressed is in line with Murphy's (1982) notion that a sense of meaning is rooted in the feelings and the "passionate nature" of the individual.

One element not included in the description of the essential structure because the element did not appear universally is nevertheless worthy of discussion because of how often the element did appear. The element is the notion of God or a higher being or church. In 8 of the 11 descriptions, there was some mention of God or a higher

being or church as either a part of the meaningful experience or as directing, or providing the experience. The references ranged from the specific mentioning of God or the Holy Spirit to vague acknowledgements, such as "someone is guiding things" and "we were 'meant' to be there at that time." The investigator purposely did not try to elicit experiences relating to God or religion or church, even going so far as to refrain from using the term spirit in the initial explanation of the study for fear of biasing the results in favor of religious experiences. On two occasions, the reference to God or a higher being came out during the debriefing phase following the interview (in the case of participants 1 and 5). However, in all other cases, the references were simply a part of the narrative. In addition, in the narrative of participant 7, the phrase "look up" stated emphatically and repeated, as well as accompanied by both hand gestures and eye movements directed upward could conceivably have been referring to "look up to God." Because the exact meaning of the phrase was not clear and the participant was not available for validation of formulated meanings, the experience was not included among the experiences identified as having a reference to God or a higher being or church.

Stern's (1971) belief that each individual creates the frame of orientation through which meaning is derived is supported by the variety of experiences described by the participants. In addition, the content of the experiences is in agreement with Klinger's (1977) contention that most incentives providing meaning to life are everyday and homely. Most of the experiences described could be considered fairly ordinary and, therefore, available to most people. In only one instance were the experiences of what might be considered a "lofty" nature (the experiences of participant 9). Further the experiences described bore out Klinger's finding that human relationships play an important role in fostering a sense of meaning to life. Although the relationships found in the descriptions were sometimes one to one, sometimes one to group, the fundamental relationship was one in which the participant was in the role of helping, meeting a need, or participating in a project seen as useful to another person or group.

In relation to the suggestion that the elderly are at-risk for loss of meaning because of the fact that traditional work roles are many times no longer available to them (Anthony, 1980; Crumbaugh, 1972), the experience of participant 6 is of interest. The participant was able

to realize that "making students feel that I cared about them as people" was the part of the work role that was the most meaningful. The participant was able to take the knowledge and seek other experiences in which the activity could be continued after retiring from the teaching profession. Although a firm conclusion cannot be drawn from the one instance, the notion that distilling from a work role the particular portion that is most meaningful and then attempting to continue looking for opportunities to experience the distilled portion is a provocative one.

Conclusions and Implications

The following discussion focuses on conclusions based on the major findings of the study. In addition, the implications for nursing are noted.

The research question of the study dealt with Frankl's (1966) framework of the will to meaning. All of the experiences described by the participants could be grouped into the categories suggested by Frankl as the categories into which meaningful experiences may be classified. The majority of the experiences were placed into the creative action category, with only one into the experiential receptivity category, and three into the attitude toward condition in life category. The reason for the skewness in terms of category placement is not

clear. However, the fact that each participant in the study was robust enough to maintain a home independently, albeit in some cases with a spouse, perhaps suggests that the participants did not need the more passive modes of experiential receptivity and attitude toward condition in life through which to experience meaning to life, at least at the time of participation in the study.

The question of why so many experiences fell into the creative action category is a matter of curiosity but does not at all alter one of the major findings of the study, which was that the experiences were all classifiable into the categories developed by Frankl (1966). There was no necessity to invent new categories. The findings of the study now join the findings of Ballard's (1965) study suggesting strongly that as Frankl (1966) theorized, individuals do experience meaning to life through creative action, through experiential receptivity toward the world, and through the attitude taken toward condition or lot in life.

The findings of the study also offer preliminary support that the critical attributes of essence, vision, action, and zeal identified from the literature by Trice (1983) as being the attributes of spirit may be the attributes of spirit as manifested by the elderly in

clear. However, the fact that each participant in the study was robust enough to maintain a home independently, albeit in some cases with a spouse, perhaps suggests that the participants did not need the more passive modes of experiential receptivity and attitude toward condition in life through which to experience meaning to life, at least at the time of participation in the study.

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The findings of the study also offer preliminary support that the critical attributes of essence, vision, action, and zeal identified from the literature by Trice (1983) as being the attributes of spirit may be the attributes of spirit as manifested by the elderly in

descriptions of meaningful experiences. Because each narrative was a description of an episode from life through which or during which the participant had the sense that life was meaningful, the essence or true self of the participant can be viewed as being embodied within the narrative.

In addition, the attribute of vision specifically refers to the experiencing of or the pursuit of meaning to life. By definition, the attribute is present in narratives dealing with life experiences identified by individuals as being experiences through which a sense of meaning to life was derived.

Further, action was a part of each experience through which a sense of meaning to life was derived. The presence of action in the narratives offers support for Trice's (1983) contention that when the spirit is involved, action occurs, and the action is in conjunction with the individual's pursuit of meaning to life (vision).

Finally, the superlative nature of the feelings expressed as part of experiencing a sense of meaning to life lends support to the portion of Trice's framework dealing with zeal. Zeal is the attribute of spirit meant

to embody the passionate, energetic, life-giving nature of the human spirit.

In considering the instrument used for data collection, at least one conclusion can be made. The experiences related in response to the question designed to elicit a description of an experience during which or through which the participant had the sense that life was meaningful were compatible with Frankl's (1966) theory of the will to meaning. The fact that descriptions of meaningful experiences were desired as well as obtained by use of the question supports that the question was a valid one. In addition, considering that the spirit is believed to manifest in the pursuit of or the experiencing of meaning to life, the presence of Trice's (1983) critical attributes of spirit within the descriptions further supports the validity of the question.

The conclusion regarding the question designed to elicit a description of the feelings associated with a meaningful experience is not as clear. Some of the participants had no difficulty describing feelings; others, notably both of the male participants, had a great deal of difficulty putting the feelings into actual words. The possibility exists that the issue of inability to express

feelings is a problem of the individual participant rather than of the question as posed.

Prior to initiation of the study, two limitations were recognized. One limitation dealt with the possibility that use of a tape recorder might have an affect in terms of the participants feeling free to be open and honest. While the participants who consented to be taped did not seem to have a problem once the initial nervousness inherent in being "on the air," as one participant stated was over, several participants did not wish to be taped. Although not wishing to be taped did not have an affect on the honesty or openness of the interview, there was an affect on the richness of the data from the nontaped interviews. The nontaped interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews from notes taken during and immediately following the interviews. Despite the fact that the crux of the experiences were retained, some of the finer points, such as specific phraseology or places of voice emphasis, were unavoidably lost.

The second limitation concerned the possibility of a sample consisting of more women than men. In fact, the study sample was skewed in favor of women with nine of the participants being female and only two male. Because of the imbalance in the sample between male and female

participants, the conclusions may be considered to hold for the female elderly population but no conclusions can be made concerning the male elderly population.

The implications for nurses and nursing are discussed. If nurses and nursing are committed to the giving of holistic care, that is care to the entire person--body, mind, and spirit--, attention must be paid to the spiritual nature of the individual as well as to the body and mind aspects. Nurses must develop a broader view of the spirit than that the spirit is only concerned with religion. The literature from other disciplines supports that pursuit of and experiencing of meaning to life is a manifestation of the spirit. If nurses are to give spiritual care, how a client experiences or pursues meaning to life is an aspect that should be assessed. In addition, the literature supports that loss of a sense of meaning to life affects the health and well-being of the individual. Nurses are in the business of promoting, maintaining, and restoring health. Not only should nurses be particularly aware of groups of clients, such as the elderly who are at-risk for loss of meaning to life, nurses should also deliberately plan care in conjunction with clients that fosters and maintains activities already

engaged in through which the clients derive a sense of meaning to life.

While the structure identified in the study as the essence of a meaningful experience to the elderly needs more study before being proclaimed a universal framework for a meaningful experience, the structure can serve as a beginning. The structure can serve as a guide when assessing elderly clients in terms of the clients' experiencing of meaning to life. In addition, the structure can be utilized in joint planning between nurse and client of care aimed at promoting, maintaining, and restoring a sense of meaningfulness to life.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations for further investigation generated by the findings of the study are as follows:

1. Although the sample of the study included two men, the majority of the participants were women. In order to better support that the structure identified of a meaningful experience to the elderly is appropriate for elderly men as well as elderly women, the study should be repeated with a sample consisting primarily of men.

2. In addition, the sample of the study was made up entirely of Caucasians. The study should be repeated on

other ethnic groups to ascertain if the structure identified in the study is unique to Caucasian populations or is perhaps cross-cultural.

3. In a similar manner, studies should be done on different age groups to determine if the structure is representative of experiences through which age groups other than the elderly derive meaning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Human Subjects' Review Committee Permission

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
Box 22939, TWU Station
RESEARCH AND GRANTS ADMINISTRATION
DENTON, TEXAS 76204

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Name of Investigator: Lucy R. Trice Center: Denton
Address: 1106 Bolivar Date: 2/19/85
Denton, TX 76201

Dear Ms. Trice,

Your study entitled An Investigation Into the Basic Structure
of a Meaningful Experience to the Elderly

has been reviewed by a committee of the Human Subjects Review
Committee and it appears to meet our requirements in regard
to protection of the individual's rights.

Please be reminded that both the University and the Depart-
ment of Health, Education, and Welfare regulations typically
require that signatures indicating informed consent be obtained
from all human subjects in your studies. These are to be filed
with the Human Subjects Review Committee. Any exception to this
requirement is noted below. Furthermore, according to DHEW regula-
tions, another review by the Committee is required if your project
changes.

Any special provisions pertaining to your study are noted
below:

 Add to informed consent form: No medical service or com-
pensation is provided to subjects by the University as a
result of injury from participation in research.

 Add to informed consent form: I UNDERSTAND THAT THE RETURN
OF MY QUESTIONNAIRE CONSTITUTES MY INFORMED CONSENT TO ACT
AS A SUBJECT IN THIS RESEARCH.

 The filing of signatures of subjects with the Human Subjects
Review Committee is not required.

xx Other: Need to include debriefing for consenting subjects.

 No special provisions apply.

cc: Graduate School
Project Director
Director of School or
Chairman of Department

Sincerely,
Ronald E. Kahl
Chairman, Human Subjects
Review Committee

at Denton

APPENDIX B

Verbal Explanation to Subjects

VERBAL EXPLANATION TO SUBJECTS

My name is Lucy Trice, and I am a graduate nursing student at Texas Woman's University. I am conducting a research study and would appreciate your help as a participant in the study. I am doing a study to identify the basic structure of a meaningful experience. By meaningful experience, I mean an experience during which a person has the feeling that life has meaning or purpose.

What I will ask you to do is first to think about what it feels like to have the sense that your life is meaningful and has purpose. I will ask you to describe that feeling in your own words. Then I will ask you to think of an experience during which you had that feeling. I will ask you to describe that experience in your own words.

I would like to tape record the interview so that I may be free to listen to you without having to take notes to remember the exact way you described the experience. I will also ask you some general questions about yourself, such as your age, marital status, number of children, and so forth. There is no time limit on the interview; we may take as long or as little time as you would like. There

are some potential risks and some potential benefits that I will explain to you.

Benefit:

The satisfaction of having participated in a project which may advance the science of nursing.

Risks:

1. Loss of anonymity due to the face-to-face nature of the interview.

2. Possible discomfort due to the tape recorder or the emotions which may surface during the interview.

3. Concern that participation or nonparticipation may in some way influence your welfare.

Measures taken to alleviate risks:

1. Only your first name will be used during the recorded interview to preserve anonymity. No names will be used in any reporting of results, either oral or written. I will have the interview typed so that I may analyze the information in it, and I will erase the tape after the interview has been typed.

2. You have the right to stop the interview at any time if you wish to, and there will be no penalty.

3. Your decision to participate or not to participate will in no way affect your welfare in terms of reward for participation or retaliation for nonparticipation.

Do you have any questions. Would you be willing to participate?

APPENDIX C
Permission Forms for Subjects

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE

CONSENT FORM B

Title of Project: Human Spirit as a Meaningful Experience to the
Elderly: A Phenomenological Study

Consent to Act as a Subject for Research and Investigation:

I have received an oral description of this study, including a fair explanation of the procedures and their purpose, any associated discomforts or risks, and a description of the possible benefits. An offer has been made to me to answer all questions about the study. I understand that my name will not be used in any release of the data and that I am free to withdraw at any time. I further understand that no medical service or compensation is provided to subjects by the university as a result of injury from participation in research.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

Certification by Person Explaining the Study:

This is to certify that I have fully informed and explained to the above named person a description of the listed elements of informed consent.

Signature

Date

Position

Witness

Date

One copy of this form, signed and witnessed, must be given to each subject. A second copy must be retained by the investigator for filing with the Chairman of the Human Subjects Review Committee. A third copy may be made for the investigator's files.

CONSENT FORM C (to be used in addition to Form A and B when voices or images are to be recorded)

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

We, the undersigned, do hereby consent to the recording of our voices and/or images by Lucy Trice, acting on this date under the authority of the Texas Woman's University. We understand that the material recorded today may be made available for educational, informational, and/or research purposes; and we do hereby consent to such use.

We hereby release the Texas Woman's University and the undersigned part acting under the authority of Texas Woman's University from any and all claims arising out of such taking, recording, reproducing, publishing, transmitting, or exhibiting as is authorized by the Texas Woman's University.

SIGNATURES OF PARTICIPANTS*

Date

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

The above consent form was read, discussed, and signed in my presence. In my opinion, the person signing said consent form did so freely and with full knowledge and understanding of its contents.

Authorized representative of the
Texas Woman's University

Date

*Guardian or nearest relative must sign if participant is minor.

APPENDIX D

Demographic Data Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Age:

Gender:

Race:

Occupation:

Marital status:

Number of children:

Proximity of family/significant others:

Current living arrangements:

APPENDIX E
Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Think about what it feels like to have the sense that your life is meaningful and has purpose. Describe that feeling as completely as you can.
2. Think of an experience during which you had this feeling. Describe that experience as completely as you can.

Prompters which may help to elicit as complete a description as possible:

- A. What were your physical surroundings during the experience?
- B. Who else was involved?
- C. What was/is their relationship to you?
- D. What emotions did you feel at the time?

APPENDIX F
Sample Transcription

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer: Think about what it feels like when you have the feeling that your life is meaningful and describe that feeling.

Participant: I think that without purpose and without meaning everything gets very dull and depressing--I think those are the two words that might

Interviewed: What would you call the opposite of those?

Participant: Uh, . . . what . . . your word, meaningful, uh, . . . it's hard for me to find words to express . . . (silence).

Interviewed: Well, let's go on to, can you think of any experience in your life--any at all, there is no right or wrong experience, any experience when you were having, that feeling that life was meaningful, that your life in particular was meaningful, was worth living, and describe that experience.

Participant: This is a very minor incident, but I thought of this the other day as something I might say to you. I spent 20 years teaching and I loved my subject and I felt that it was important. I wanted to do it right, but actually, a lot of my best experiences were with students, with them as people rather than as people that I was trying to get to absorb my subject. And I had a little girl, our first teaching experience F.'s and mine was in . . . on the border, that's where we met, we were there at a time when the Mexican-Americans were just beginning to get resentful of the rest of us, I think we were called Anglos, unless we were called something else (chuckle). And I had a little girl in class, R. and we had always gotten along just fine. One day in class she simply blew up and it had to do with this

business of her being Latin-American. She was fighting the Anglos, I don't remember what the occasion was that brought this up. I took her out of class and she thought I was going to punish her exceedingly because she really deserved it. I got her out in the hall and put my arm around her and became her friend. And uh, experiences like that meant so much to me as a teacher. I always felt when I could get close to a student, get underneath their skin a little bit, and make them feel that I was interested in them, that was one of the best experiences when I was a teacher--or in my life really. Because I did love teaching and I did love students. Part of why I enjoy my volunteering now is because I still have a little bit of that same, well I meet those former students and I relate some to patients the same way, just in the 20 minutes that it takes to take a patient to x-ray and lab and then to their rooms you get to know these people and understand what their problems are. You listen--some of them have never been in a hospital before. And even some of the ones who've been here . . . (some chit chat)

You know all week I've thought about this and what's meaningful and I've had feelings. I've analyzed my own years, how humble I should feel because almost everything I have is built on my heritage and I guess for most of us it is. But the things that mean most to me are the things that have come to me from my family or my country. I don't deserve the credit for any of them. My Christian background, my family background, everything is based on those who went before. For instance, education is something that has been a part of my life since the time I was born. Everybody in my family is either a teacher or a preacher, so naturally education is meaningful to me.

Interviewer: Do you think your interest in people comes from your background?

Participant: I don't know, my mother and father died when I was very young--in some cases it could be a reaction against it. (Brief discussion of her childhood and how she was shuttled from one aunt to another, not all of whom were particularly kind to her.)

APPENDIX G

Complete List of Significant Statements

COMPLETE LIST OF SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

1. Can remember when I was so happy I would just run and scream.
2. Never felt "oh, what will I do next?" Always knew I was capable of going along and making the best of things.
3. Never say "I can't do that."
4. Had one child and was 6 months pregnant with another when my husband left.
5. Had to move back in with my parents.
6. I looked forward to the day when I could get out again and give them a happier life.
7. When my baby was 6 months old, I was clerking in a store and had moved out into an apartment.
8. It wasn't fair to them, they had raised their family.
9. I always thought about what is fair to my parents, what is going to hurt them, what is fair to my children.
10. Sometimes I can't let her (daughter) know (that I need something) because she takes too much responsibility.
11. The feeling (that you can make it) comes from knowing that there's a higher power out there directing things.
12. You always feel better when you're productive, helping someone.
13. You always feel better when you have a goal and you're working toward something.
14. When you accomplish something.

15. I'm answering a need for people that I care a great deal about.
16. A matter of getting up, getting him his medicine at a certain hour . . . and then I'm right back in bed and asleep again.
17. I'm looking forward to it (going to live with sister and brother-in-law), there's lots to do out there.
18. It is the opposite of depression.
19. You are doing something worthwhile.
20. Meaningfulness comes from a relationship with God and with other people.
21. She was really sick, not expected to live, and they asked my husband to go and comfort the family.
22. So I activated the prayer chain, and we prayed so hard.
23. When she walked into that meeting it was like God was showing us not just that He answers prayer, but how well He answers prayers.
24. The most awful feeling is when nobody needs you.
25. When you're holding your own flesh and blood (baby) and you know you're their protector and there's something to look forward to in raising them.
26. I had my grandson for 2 years (to care for) because of a problem he had.
27. I taught Sunday School to 11 and 12-year-olds--that is a crucial age for them to be learning the Bible and what it means.
28. When you've been instrumental in helping someone.
29. My husband was really sick a couple of years ago.
30. I was there with him most of the day (in the hospital), brought my blankets and such and camped out in the waiting room most nights.

31. My husband told someone, "I would have died if it hadn't have been for her."
32. All experiences are meaningful, there is a reason for everything. (Said in the context of what happens today having a bearing on the future.)
33. Someone is guiding things, has to be, there's a reason for everything, every experience is meaningful.
34. Without purpose and without meaning everything gets very dull and depressing.
35. I spent 20 years teaching and I loved my subject.
36. A lot of my best experiences were with students as people, not as people I was trying to get to absorb my subject.
37. Our first teaching experience was on the border--we were there at the time when the Mexican-Americans were just beginning to get resentful of the rest of us.
38. I had a little girl (Mexican-American) in class--we'd always gotten along fine.
39. One day in class she blew up and it had to do with this business of her being Mexican-American.
40. She was fighting the Anglos.
41. I took her out of the class and she thought I was going to punish her exceedingly because she really deserved it.
42. I put my arm round her and became her friend.
43. Experiences like that meant so much.
44. I always felt when I could get close to a student, get underneath their skin a little bit and make them feel I was interested in them, that was one of the best experiences when I was a teacher--or in my life really.

45. Part of why I enjoy my volunteering now is because . . . I relate some to patients the same way.
46. In just the 20 minutes or so it takes to take a patient to lab, etc., you get to know these people and understand their problems.
47. You listen, some of them have never been in the hospital before.
48. My husband had been shot down (experience occurred during World War II) and I was in the hospital having S.
49. Was a very down period for me, I thought my husband was dead.
50. Here I was with a new child and I wasn't with my own family, I was with my husband's.
51. I was feeling mighty sorry for N. (self)!
52. (Overheard nurses talking) Was that a message about my husband?
53. Whatever it is good or bad, I want to know.
54. (News was that husband was alive and a P.O.W.) Don't you know that's the best news you could have given me?
55. I kind of opened my eyes and looked upward and thought life is really worthwhile, I don't need to be down, I need to look up (gestured with hand and eyes, "look up").
56. It was a feeling of elation, one of "N. get up and get out of this bed and let's get on with life!"
57. I realized this wasn't the end of the world, that we're going to go on from here and make the best of every day.
58. I had to keep telling myself I had to take care of myself--I had this responsibility, with or without a daddy, this is my responsibility (referring to baby).

59. Went to Mexico City with family on business and met another couple during the course of the business.
60. Other couple became "enchanted" with her children.
61. Other couple wished to adopt a baby and asked for help from her and her husband.
62. She and husband contacted various agents/agencies in an attempt to help the couple.
63. Through their help, the other couple was able to adopt a child 9 months to the day after first expressing the desire to do so.
64. "This was a meaningful experience because we were able to help this couple."
65. "We were 'meant' to go there at that time and meet them."
66. A bunch of us at church were asked to volunteer for some phase of the work (starting the Emergency Alert Response System program).
67. I was the only one who had time available to spend with installations.
68. I had doubts (as to usefulness of the program) for two full years--no actual usage had been made in an emergency situation.
69. Clients were living alone trying to keep going in their own homes, used them (Emergency Alert Response System units) to call for help in an emergency.
70. We've had at least a dozen situations where the equipment really served its purpose.
71. This certainly has been a case where I felt what few talents that I had have come in handy.
72. In this particular instance, I felt that maybe there was some purpose in my existence justifying some of the space I take up.

73. There have been a number of other instances: took the initiative in trying to push the development of a Ph.D. program.
74. In this area (geographic) there was no other Ph.D. program in this field, and there were engineers who wanted to further their education.
75. There was a real need for a Ph.D. program.
76. I spent quite a bit of time developing the idea of the program.
77. Got the program approved. Can't claim all the credit by any means but at least had an important part, I like to think, in getting the program started.
78. You know how important publishable research is--knew I wouldn't have time--wanted to take some of the burden of meetings off my staff so that they would have time.
79. (In response to question regarding the feelings associated with feeling that life is meaningful) I don't know that I felt any different from any other situation.
80. I've always tried to look ahead a little.
81. Did think a lot during World War II when I was sitting around twiddling my thumbs that I was doing more for the war effort back here than I was in the Navy.
82. That's the only time in my life I can remember having time on my hands
83. I could have accomplished more back here.
84. Then here recently with this Emergency Alert Response System program--for the first 2 years I wasn't sure that it was going to serve any useful purpose.
85. But when it started it really started (being useful)!

86. My daughter killed herself--the shock was terrible, I grieved for a month--intense grief.
87. We all have an inner voice, what would you call it, the Holy Spirit, that comes to help us.
88. Was sitting in my chair a month to the day after she died. The Spirit told me that R. was happy, was perfectly all right.
89. The most wonderful feeling of love came up on the inside and spilled out.
90. Hearing of God's love is nothing like experiencing it.
91. What can I do? and the Voice said, "you can help other people."
92. And so I had to decide where am I going to go to do this.
93. If you work here (hospital volunteer), you always get these feelings of you're helping somebody.
94. When you work so hard to raise money for (charity) and it's all over and you're so tired and you go home and you think "look what we did!"
95. It's not just here at the hospital either . . . described helping friends do tasks they were no longer able to do.
96. Joy (in response to question regarding the feelings associated with a sense that life is meaningful).
97. I don't care how old you are, there's always places you can help.
98. The kind of work I'm involved in is kind of a permanent nature. If it's installed properly, it'll last a long time.
99. I get kind of a pleasure out of driving by a job that I've done 20 or 30 years ago.

100. I work with lots of young people and some of them will go on to make a professional plasterer or tile setter.
101. I look back and see what they've done and what they can do and I feel like maybe I had a small part in it--in them learning a profession.
102. It kind of puts a meaning to your life.
103. A young person that started out real young with you and had matured and raised a family and you feel like maybe you helped them get started.
104. It's things like that that really put a meaning to your life.
105. I always had a lot of pride in my work (in response to question regarding feelings associated with the sense that life is meaningful).
106. I take a lot of pride in that, that I have helped young people.
107. When I started, the old craftsmen were jealous of their trades and would hardly show a young man anything.
108. I've never been involved in making a lot of money.
109. I've felt like what I've done has been oh, you might say a monument to my abilities.

APPENDIX H

Complete List of Formulated Meanings

COMPLETE LIST OF FORMULATED MEANINGS

1. The feeling associated with a sense of meaning to life was one of happiness.
2. The participant believed maintaining a positive attitude of "I can" rather than "I can't" was important.
3. The participant was forced to move home with the participant's parents with one child and another one on the way because of abandonment by the husband.
4. The participant did not like having to move home to parents, seeing it as an imposition on them. The participant looked forward to the time when she and her children could move out on their own.
5. The participant did move out when the new baby was 6 months old.
6. The participant was very concerned about the feelings of others, what was fair to others, almost to the exclusion of what was fair to herself.
7. The participant attributed the sense that she should always respond with "I can" in adverse situations to the presence of a higher being directing her life.
8. The participant believed that helping someone, working toward a goal, or accomplishing something were tasks that generated a sense that life was meaningful (responses to question regarding feelings).
9. The participant believed that going to care for her brother-in-law was answering a need. She cared a great deal for the brother-in-law and the sister.
10. The participant viewed the interruptions in her own life patterns (such as sleep) as not important when she was caring for the brother-in-law.
11. The participant was looking forward to going to care for the brother-in-law, not only because of being

able to care for him but also because there were a lot of other things to do "out there."

12. The feeling associated with a sense of meaning is the opposite of depression. The feeling comes when the participant believes she is doing something worthwhile.
13. The participant believes that meaningfulness comes from an individual's relationship to God and to other people.
14. The participant learned about a very sick young woman and decided to activate the church's prayer chain on the young woman's behalf.
15. When the young woman not only did not die but was able to attend a meeting where the participant was, the participant viewed this as a message from God that He not only answers prayer but that He answers prayer "in a big way."
16. The feeling associated with a sense that life is not meaningful is a "most awful" feeling. The feeling comes when "nobody needs you." The inference is that the feelings associated with life being meaningful would be the opposite.
17. The experience of holding one's own baby with the attendant knowledge that one has the responsibility for protecting and raising the baby is one through which meaning is derived.
18. The participant considered caring for a grandchild an experience through which meaning was derived. Note should be made that the participant was not a young woman when this task was undertaken.
19. The participant also derived meaning from teaching Sunday School to children who were at a crucial age for learning the Bible.
20. The feeling associated with a sense of meaning comes when the participant believes she has been instrumental in helping someone.

21. The participant's husband had been quite ill. The participant cared for the husband continually for several weeks, while he was in the hospital. Despite her age (well into her 60s at the time of the incident), the participant did not seem to feel that her devotion ("camping out" on the waiting room floor at night) was unusual.
22. The participant felt good about the fact that her husband attributed the fact that he had survived the illness to her care.
23. The participant believes that all experiences have meaning and are for a purpose regardless of whether the purpose is readily apparent at the time. The participant believes that a higher being "guides" daily life, making all experiences meaningful.
24. Feelings associated with not having a sense that life is meaningful are a sense of dullness and depression. The inference is that having a sense of meaning to life would provide the opposite sensations/feelings.
25. The participant was a teacher by profession but viewed experiences with her pupils as individuals, as "people" as meaningful rather than the teaching itself.
26. The participant's first teaching experience was during the time when racial tension between Anglo-Americans and Mexican-Americans was beginning to occur. An incident occurred in the participant's classroom between a Mexican-American child and some Anglo-American children.
27. The Mexican-American child was perceived to be in the wrong and, therefore, deserving of punishment. This perception is held by both the child and the participant. The participant perceived a need in the child for the participant to be understanding, to "be a friend." The participant chose to meet this need rather than to discipline the child.
28. Choosing to meet the child's need to be understood and to feel that the participant was interested in the child as a person and not just as a student was

the experience from which the participant derived a sense of meaning.

29. The participant perceived that students had a need to feel that their teachers were interested in them as individuals rather than just in whether or not the students learned the subject. The participant perceived herself as actively attempting to meet the need.
30. The participant perceives that patients in the hospital have the same need as the students. That is, to feel that someone is interested in them, the patients, as individuals rather than simply as patients. Again, the participant sees herself as actively attempting to meet the need.
31. The participant was in a situation where she did not know the husband's fate, only that he had been shot down during World War II. She was in the hospital having a baby, not close to her own family, feeling depressed and lonely perhaps.
32. The participant asked for news of the husband. She wanted to know regardless of good or bad.
33. The participant was elated by the news that the husband was a prisoner of war because at least he was alive. The knowledge that the husband was alive gave rise to hope for the future.
34. The feeling tone was one of elation.
35. There is a sense that the near tragedy helped the participant realize that she had a responsibility to go on and make the best of life, regardless.
36. The baby needed her, so she must set aside her own feelings and resolved to "take of herself" because the baby needed her.
37. The participant and her husband were willing to be of help to a couple met during the course of a business trip outside the United States.
38. The meaningfulness was derived through the sense of having been of help to someone.

39. The inference is that some higher powers had a hand in arranging that the two couples met at the particular times that they met.
40. The participant's church was involved in establishing the Emergency Alert Response System program and asked members to help. The participant volunteered in the area of installation of the units.
41. The inference is that if the equipment was not used in emergency situations, then perhaps the program and the time spent on it was a wasted effort.
42. The inference is that being involved in a project that was useful in helping other people served to give the participant a sense of purpose.
43. Again, a description of being involved in a project that would be beneficial to others.
44. The feeling tone is a positive one, primarily that the participant has spent and continues to spend time in pursuits perceived by the participant as useful. "Idle time" is not perceived as "useful" time as noted by the phrases "twiddling my thumbs" and "the only time I can remember having time on my hands." The notion of spending time in useful pursuits might be an attitude toward life in general as noted by the statement, "I don't know that I felt any different from any other situation."
45. A tragedy had occurred which caused a period of deep grieving.
46. After a period of grieving, an inner voice, the participant referred to as the Holy Spirit, reassured the participant that her daughter was happy and "all right." The participant experienced a sensation of being loved by God and described this as a wonderful feeling.
47. The participant seemed to be lifted out of her grief and asked, "what can I do," meaning what did the Holy Spirit wish her to do. The reply was that the participant could help others.

48. The participant is a hospital volunteer because, through volunteering, she experiences the sense of helping others.
49. The sense of having been of help is worth the hard work.
50. The participant has taken the direction to help others into her daily life. Helping others has become "a way of life," so to speak.
51. The feeling associated with a sense that life is meaningful is one of joy.
52. Helping others is something individuals can do regardless of age.
53. The participant is in the construction business. The participant takes pride in a job well done. The participant believes that the fact that a job has lasted so long is a testimony to the job having been done well.
54. Another source of pride is that the participant works with young people and helps them learn the profession.
55. The feeling associated with a sense of meaning to life is pride of accomplishment.
56. The inference here is that the participant went against tradition in choosing to help young people learn the profession.
57. Again, the emphasis is on pride in a job well done.