Meaning in Life: An Exploration of the Relevance of Psychological Theories to Older Women

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Psychology University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon

By Fern Nancy Stockdale Winder

Spring 1997

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SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

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DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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MEANING IN LIFE: AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELEVANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES TO OLDER WOMEN

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of meaning in life and to consider the relevance of psychological theories of meaning in life to the lived experiences of meaning in the lives of older women in Saskatchewan. Eight women were interviewed, using open-ended questions, about their life experiences, and in particular were asked what had given them meaning during their lives and how they perceived that meaning to have changed. These interviews were analyzed using a thematic/structural analysis to identify the themes and the structures that were present in the transcripts. First-person narrative accounts were then developed of each woman’s story, through a process of interpretive construction. Finally, a comparative analysis was done, comparing the women’s stories to the theories. It was found that while psychological theories were generally sufficient in understanding the cognitive aspects of meaning in life, they were less helpful in understanding women whose meanings in life were more experiential. It was also found that various theories of change were more or less applicable to each woman’s story, and no one theory stood out as being able to encompass all elements of change or stability.

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Abstract

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1. Introduction

The process of change in people’s lives has been a source of fascination for me. This fascination began in an undergraduate class in adult development when I was introduced to Erikson’s theory of development, and realized for the first time that adults did not necessarily remain constant entities over their life spans. Parallel with this interest in change was an interest in philosophy, spirituality, and eventually in Frankl’s theories about meaning. I became intrigued with meaning in life and began to research how meaning-making might influence responses to events such as bereavement. Finally, personal events in my own life such as the deaths of siblings, marriage, the birth of a child, exposure to feminist issues, and gaining clinical experience and graduate training, all affected my system of meaning-making and how I thought about my own personal meaning in life. Thus an interest in change, in meaning in life, and significant changes in my own system of meaning-making have led me to a point of researching changes in meaning in life.

In this study eight older women from Saskatchewan were interviewed about their life experiences and their meanings in life. They were asked, in particular, to consider how their meaning may have changed over their life spans, and how they understood that change. These interviews were first analyzed for themes and structures of meaning in life. The results of this thematic/structural analysis were compared to models of meaning in life found in the literature. The interviews were then smoothed and condensed into first-person accounts of each woman’s meaning in life. These first-person narratives were then compared to the psychological theories of meaning in life, with the goal of each illuminating the other. Finally, some of the characteristics of the change process, across interviews, were highlighted.

In this introduction, I begin by defining meaning in life in an attempt to develop a concept that has both sufficient substance and flexibility to allow it to move through many different theoretical frameworks. I suggest a possible conceptualization of the dimensions of meaning in life. I then review several different theories that are broadly categorized as existential, life transitional, developmental, and narrative. Within the existentialist category I
place Yalom (1980) and Frankl (1969, 1984, 1990). Under the life transition theorists I review Erikson (1982) and Baumeister (1991) and under the developmental theorists I place Carlsen (1988, 1991) and Fowler (1981, 1983). I have also included McAdams (1991, 1994) as representative of the narrative perspective on lives. This review is not a critique of the theories, but rather an overview of their most prominent features. I have made the assumption that all of these theories can make a contribution to our understanding of meaning in life, some theories more so than others for a particular woman. I am exploring which theories might be most helpful in understanding the experiences of older women. After discussing each theory of meaning in life, I speculate on some of the ways in which older women’s socialization and life experiences may lead to better or poorer fit with the theory. At the end of the review of each theory you will find the prominent markers which I believe might be present in a woman’s life to which the theory was salient.

Placing the theories in these categories constitutes my interpretation of the theory’s perspective on how change in meaning in life occurs. In order for a theory to be classified as developmental it must state that there are actual qualitative changes in meaning in life which occur throughout the life-span. Furthermore these changes are more than simply adaptations to life events, but actually reflect a growth, progression, or expansion towards higher stages (Basseches, 1984). Thus, when evaluating a theory of meaning in life to see if it could fit within a developmental model, I am assuming that the theory must demonstrate that meaning in life does not simply change over the life span, but that it changes in a certain qualitative direction. Alternately the theory may more closely fit a life-transitional model in which individuals’ meaning in life changes in response to predictable life events. The life event and the individual’s response to it are presumed to be predictable from the individual’s chronological age, the society’s age and role expectations, and historical factors (Neugarten & Datan, 1973). The manner in which the individual changes is not presumed to be hierarchical (Neugarten & Datan, 1973). The theory may be an existential model, which states that existential life crises influence changes in a person, in ways which stem from the life crises themselves. The existential model does not focus on the timing of the events within the life-span. The narrative model, as represented by McAdams, focuses on the
person's construction of his/her life story and, as such, focuses on changes in the construction of that story. Although a theory may be primarily concerned with one type of change in meaning in life, such as developmental, it may also contain elements of a life-transitional model or an existential model. I examine these exceptions in the discussion of each theory.
2. Defining Meaning in Life

2.1 A Definition

Meaning in life has a rich historical and theoretical background. There are, however, three key aspects which are included in most conceptualizations and usages of the term meaning in life. People are considered to have meaning in their lives when they possess a belief in some type of order or coherence in the world, and/or when they have a sense of their own purpose or meaning within that world, and/or when they have an accompanying sense of fulfillment (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Reker & Wong, 1988; Shapiro, 1988; Thompson & Janigian. 1988; Yalom, 1980).

One of the earliest models of meaning in life was developed by Battista & Almond (1973). They proposed a two-dimensional model composed of framework and fulfillment. Framework referred to the “ability of an individual to see his life within some perspective or context, and to have derived a set of life-goals, purpose in life, or life-view from them” (p.411). Fulfillment referred to the degree to which an individual considered him/herself to be fulfilling the goals derived from his/her framework. They called the combination of these two factors Positive Life Regard: “an individual’s belief that he is fulfilling a life-framework or life-goal that provides him with a highly valued understanding of his life” (Battista & Almond, 1973, p.410).

Battista & Almond noted that their model may be biased against participants who are not consciously aware of having a framework. They also noted that inherent in having a framework is the assumption of one framework being sufficient. One of their studies indicated that participants had more than one framework. In an increasingly pluralistic society, one coherent framework is likely to become less common, as they acknowledged.

Battista & Almond’s model is highly goal-oriented. They assumed that a natural outcome of a framework was to have sets of goals, and to strive to achieve them. Their model was developed with medical students, who may have been quite goal-oriented, and it likely reflected some of the characteristics of their meaning in life. Battista & Almond also
assumed that positive affect is present when an individual is fulfilling his/her framework of meaning.

Shapiro’s (1988) framework for the study of meaning in life contained the two dimensions of sense (finding order in the world) and significance (knowing what is of value). In an earlier framework, Shapiro included life purpose as part of significance. Later he argued that purpose should be distinct from meaning in life, because many writers use the term purpose and meaning in life, rather than simply meaning in life (Shapiro, 1988). He believed this indicated an underlying conception that meaning and purpose in life were two separate constructs. I find it preferable to consider the term meaning in life to be overarching, including both a sense of order in the world and a sense of one’s purpose in the world.

Thompson and Janigian (1988) discussed life meaning in the context of life crises. They also believed that found or created meaning in life has the two aspects of order and purpose. “An event is meaningful when we understand how it follows in an orderly fashion from our views and beliefs and when it has a purpose whose value we recognize” (p.263). Although they referred to the meaning of life events rather than the more general concept of meaning in life, their process of meaning-making certainly overlaps with the broader framework.

Reker & Peacock (1981, see also Reker, 1992) developed an instrument called the Life Attitude Profile-Revised, to measure the elements of life attitude that would be relevant to Frankl’s theory. It was a multi-dimensional factorially-derived instrument that included purpose, coherence, life control, death acceptance, existential vacuum, and goal seeking. They stated that purpose and coherence together formed the personal meaning index. It is personal meaning which seems to have the most similarity with this study’s construct of meaning in life. Reker and Wong (1988) identified three defining components of personal meaning: cognitive, motivational, and affective. They proposed that cognitively people attempt to make sense of events in their lives, their reason for being, and the order of the world. Motivationally people are guided by values whose pursuit and fulfillment give a sense of meaning and purpose. Reker and Wong believed (1988) that the realization of personal meaning will always be accompanied by feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment. They
summarized their position as follows: “Thus, personal meaning may be defined as the
cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one’s existence, the pursuit and attainment of
worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment” (p.221).

Yalom (1980) also seemed to imply that meaning in life requires both a sense of order
and a sense of purpose. He discussed various world views, particularly those of existential
writers, and noted that they strove to develop a system of meaning and of values to replace
the cosmic or religious system. He wrote in some detail about how important a sense of
purpose was to therapy clients. Thus, Yalom’s summary of meaning in life is similar to the
conceptualizations of other writers.

Baumeister’s (1991) conceptualization of meaning in life is resonant with Reker and
Wong’s conceptualization. He proposed meaning in life was composed of purpose, value,
efficacy, and self-worth. He believed that in order for people to have meaning in their lives,
they needed to have a sense of purpose or some life goals, to believe that their actions were of
value, or were “good” within some moral framework, to feel that they had some degree of
efficacy or control over their lives, and to value themselves and feel valued within society.
Self-worth is quite akin to the affective component of Reker and Wong. Efficacy is
comparable to both the affective component and the motivation component of Reker and
Wong. As with Reker and Wong’s model, Baumeister’s model suggests that there is a
linkage between having meaning in life, and one’s emotional well-being.

Unlike other authors, Baumeister argued that there is no overarching framework of
meaning in life. He stated that in our society, we splice together fragmented meanings, and
are no longer concerned with how those pieces fit together. The title of his book, *Meanings
of Life*, conveys his view of the plurality and multiple dimensions of meaning. Baumeister
acknowledged, however, by his inclusion of value, that some sense of moral framework is
needed for meaning in life.

Both Reker and Wong and Baumeister suggested that meaning in life is accompanied
by positive affective states. In some sense, there can be no meaning in life without a
recognition of the affective, self-worth, and efficacy components. Thus, at the most general
level, there seem to be three components of meaning in life: a sense of order, a sense of
purpose, and a sense of fulfillment. The degree of the development of the sense of order and purpose, however, varies from being highly developed and encompassing in Battista and Almond’s (1973) model, and being more fragmented in Baumeister’s model. The sense of fulfillment includes positive affect, motivation, efficacy, and self-worth. What might this mean in the life of an ordinary person?

A person who has a sense of order in his/her world will likely have the following characteristics:

1. An overarching view of the world or several frameworks through which the world is viewed. This view may be religious, existentialist, humanist, or any other encompassing world view or combination of world views. These world views may vary from being extremely rigid in form to being extremely flexible. They may be adaptive for the person or problematic or both. It may be consciously expressible, consciously inexpressible, or unconscious, but it is, nevertheless, influential (Smith, 1965).

2. A set of values or beliefs relating to conduct that are an extension of a person’s world view (Reker & Wong, 1988, Baumeister, 1991). Like the world view, these values may range widely on a variety of dimensions.

A person who has a sense of purpose in his/her life will likely have the following characteristics:

1. A sense of how he/she fits into his/her sense of order. The person not only has a sense of what life is about, but also a personal sense of how his/her life fits into that world. Again this personal sense of order may range from being highly fluid to being quite concrete.

2. This personal sense of order results in a purpose or a motivation in life. It is a conviction that one is doing what one should be doing, although that sense of oughtness may be perceived as being cosmic, societal, or completely internal. This sense of purpose may be held with great confidence and certainty, or with much doubting (May, 1975). It does, however, provide at least some degree of motivation for one’s life and one’s actions.

A person who has a sense of fulfillment in her/his life would likely have some of the following characteristics:

1. Some degree of positive affect resulting from a belief that one’s actions and values are congruent, and a belief that one is able to be an effective agent in one’s own life.
2.2 Existential Psychological Theories

2.2.1 Yalom/Bugental/May

2.2.1.1 Assumptions about Meaning in Life

Existential psychology is perhaps one of the richest sources of writing on meaning in life in the psychological literature. I rely heavily on Yalom's (1980) synthesis of this area, and also May (1975) and Bugental (1965, 1968). I cannot do justice to the complexity of existential psychology in this brief review, rather I attempt to identify a few of the more salient features of existential psychology.

Existential psychology centers on the fact of our existence. There are some universal givens about being or existing which every individual must face. These givens vary somewhat from writer to writer. Yalom (1980) included death, freedom (including responsibility and will), isolation, and meaninglessness. Almost as soon as we come to an awareness of life, we come to an awareness of death, and we may spend much of our lives trying to come to terms with our ultimate end. Freedom, the knowledge that we are responsible for our lives, and that we can will many events in our lives to occur, is a frightening given of existence for many people. Isolation, in the existential sense, refers to the fact that even though we may be involved in relationships, we are ultimately alone—we are born alone and we die alone. Finally, Yalom, and most existentialists, except perhaps Kierkegaard (see Lauber, 1990), believed that there is no cosmic or even collective meaning of life (Moody, 1991). Thus, one must come to terms with the fact that life has no ultimate meaning, but still have the courage to create one's own personal meaning (May, 1975).

Bugental (1968) listed quite similar existential givens and a few additional ones:

1. We are embodied physically.
2. We are limited—in awareness, in strength, in life span, in all dimensions—within unlimitedness.
3. We can act and not act.
4. We can choose among the actions we will take.
5. We are apart from yet a part of others. (pp. 386-387)
Bugental (1965) added that in being willing to face existential tragedy, we also discover existential joy. Bugental’s explicit inclusion of the paradoxes of existence and of existential joy add a somewhat fuller dimension to the givens. They remain, however, similar to Yalom’s descriptions, and Yalom and Bugental’s descriptors provide the reader with a view of the universe existential psychologists believe we inhabit.

The existentialist position both narrowly and broadly defines meaning in life. The most important exclusionary criterion is that meaning in life cannot be cosmic, or originating outside of the human existence, because the existentialists presuppose no existence beyond this one. Thus, meaning in life must be created by the individual or by the society. In North American society, it is generally assumed to be created by the individual, because there are few moral absolutes to guide the development of meaning in an era of relativism. Meaning in life is thus narrowed by the exclusion of cosmic meaning, but widened by the inclusion of any meaning an individual chooses to give his/her life.

The only criteria of “true” meaning in life seems to be authenticity (Bugental, 1965). One must live authentically within the awareness of the boundaries of the universal givens. Self-deception or a refusal to acknowledge existential givens will result in a lifestyle which is non-authentic. Problems in living (e.g., neuroticism) arise when one is not authentic in living.

Two other assumptions which Yalom (1980) made about meaning in life were that it is conscious and that it is created. Although he stated that many of our existential anxieties are unconscious, it would seem from his case examples that individuals are generally aware when they have meaning in their lives. Meaning in life is also assumed to be created by the individual rather than discovered. There is not a cosmic, collective, or individual meaning in life waiting to be discovered. Each person must find the courage to create his/her own. In fact, the doubts that may accompany this process of creating one’s personal meaning are healthier than complete confidence in a discovered meaning (May, 1975).
2.2.1.2 Implications for Change

Yalom (1980) never explicitly addressed the issue of whether meaning in life changes in a specific direction over the life span or not. His basic premise was that when we are confronted with situations that bring us into unavoidable contact with universal givens, we will struggle, at least for a time, with our existence and with the meaning of our lives. Various personal, situational, and societal factors influence the emergence of meaning in life from that encounter. Yalom did note that certain life events within the life span may be more likely to bring a client to consider certain universal givens. For example, aging may prompt a greater consideration of death, the death of one’s parents may increase one’s sense of isolation, and moving out of one’s parents’ home may increase a sense of freedom. He did not, however, place these confrontations with universal givens within a life span perspective. He did not argue that at certain points in the life span, certain threats and possible changes in meaning in life are likely to occur.

Bugental (1965) explicitly stated that existential crises do not happen frequently, and likely only occur once in an individual’s life because the crisis involves a challenge to an individual’s entire sense of being in the world. He outlined the development of an existential crisis and the possible outcomes of that crisis. Confrontation with an existential given leads to existential anxiety. This may result in dread (neurotic anxiety) or courage (accepting our existential needs). If an individual chooses to live in dread, then neurotic anxiety may result. When one chooses to live with courage, then one is able to live authentically and to meet one’s existential needs—rootedness, identity, meaningfulness, and relatedness. Bugental was quite specific in that he believed that it is the existential given of choice which leads to the existential anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness. Through creativity one is able to develop meaning in life.

Thus I conclude from Yalom and Bugental’s writings and from other authors as well (Lauber, 1990; May, 1975; Redekopp, 1990) that existential psychologists generally take the perspective that meaning in life comes from an encounter with a universal given. This confrontation leads the individual to confront the ultimate reality of the meaninglessness of life, and to create his/her own personal meaning. My impression is that once an individual
has reached this point, and has begun to develop his/her own meaning in life, there is an
evolvement of that meaning, but no demarcated stages or changes in the individual’s meaning
in life.

2.2.1.3 Possible Differences for Some Women

The existential given of birth is rarely mentioned by the existential psychologists I have
reviewed. For many women, giving birth is a tremendously important event in their lives. It
would seem possible that for some women, pregnancy and giving birth are existential givens
of our universe which lead to contemplation of life, death, and the meaning of life.

Yalom (1980) focused on the existential given of isolation. There is considerable
speculation and at least some empirical literature to suggest that many women value
connectedness very highly (Hassan & Bar-Yam, 1987). The societal structure of many
women’s lives still tends to enhance connectedness with children, friends, parents, and other
family members. For some women, Bugental’s existential reality of being part and apart may
have more resonance than Yalom’s focus on isolation.

Yalom mentioned that for some people meaning in life may simply not be an issue
because survival needs have not been met. He noted that individuals who were constantly
working simply to provide food and clothing for themselves, for children or for other
dependents may have no mental or physical reserves left with which to consider meaning in
life. Given that the cohort of women that I interviewed grew up in the Depression, this
speculation deserves some attention.

2.2.1.4 Markers of Yalom’s View of Meaning in Life

There are several markers which would generally be present in an individual who had
created an existential meaning in life:

1. The individual would have had a life experience which brought the individual face-to-
   face with a universal given. This experience may be a gradual one, such as aging, or a
   sudden event, such as the death of a close friend.

2. The individual becomes consciously aware of the realities of his/her existence.

3. This conscious awareness leads to a partial or complete dismantling of previous belief
   systems which sheltered the individual from existential realities.
4. A new belief system is created which includes a sense of order and sense of purpose for the individual’s life, but which is authentic.

5. This new belief system should result in greater mental health (a freedom from neurotic symptoms) but it may or may not lead to a sense of well-being or to increased happiness. It should lead to a greater experience of existential joy (Bugental, 1965).

2.2.2 Frankl

2.2.2.1 Assumptions about Meaning in Life

Frankl (1969, 1984, 1990) has written extensively about human beings’ search for meaning or our will to meaning. Frankl believed that humans have a strong will to find meaning in their lives. If we do not find it, or if the search is somehow thwarted, existential frustration will result. Frankl believed that many people in North America and in Europe suffer from an existential vacuum in their lives that consists of feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness. This inner emptiness may be evidenced by addiction, aggression, or depression. People have a will to find meaning in their lives, but finding meaning does not lead to a tensionless state:

What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him....the existential dynamics in a polar field of tension where one pole is represented by a meaning that is to be fulfilled and the other pole by the man who has to fulfill it. (Frankl, 1984, p.127)

Thus, one of the primary characteristics of being is a will to meaning in Frankl’s theory.

Frankl described the “Tragic Triad” of logotherapy which are the existential givens of this school. They are suffering, guilt, and transitoriness. Suffering refers to the inevitable pain which accompanies human existence. Guilt refers to the product of our conscience and transitoriness refers to death. Logotherapy is a form of existential therapy which developed from Frankl’s work. The focus of logotherapy is to examine the existential givens, and to assist clients in discovering meaning in their lives.
Frankl believed that despite, or sometimes as a result of, confrontation with these existential givens, we can find meaning in our lives. He identified three paths to discovering meaning in life: "(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering" (Frankl, 1984, p.133). These have been summarized as the creative, experiential, and attitudinal paths (Redekopp, 1990). Frankl thought that the creative path was self-explanatory, but he described the experiential and attitudinal paths in more detail. The experiential path refers to meaning in life which is found through a deep experience with someone or something. In particular he discussed loving another human being as a way of finding meaning in life. The attitudinal path refers to our unique ability to choose our attitude towards life despite our circumstances. Frankl believed this freedom in discovering meaning is one which can never be taken away and gave numerous examples from his experiences in concentration camps as evidence for his assertion. He pointed out, however, that suffering is not necessary for the discovery of meaning, but rather that meaning may be found despite suffering.

There are three other characteristics of Frankl's meaning in life which set his theory apart from other existentialists. Frankl believed that meaning is discovered rather than created. There is a unique meaning for each person's life, and it is the responsibility of each person to find that meaning. Frankl's view contradicts the dominant existentialist view that meaning in life is created by the individual. A second characteristic of Frankl's view is that the ultimate meaning in life is self-transcendent which in turn is related to the third characteristic of cosmic meaning. By self-transcendence, Frankl meant that meaning in life is not found simply through a process of self-actualization, but by a process of living in some sense for the well-being of others. He believed that self-actualization is a by-product of self-transcendence. The self-transcendence is made possible, in part, by a belief in a cosmic meaning in life which Frankl called a super-meaning:

Ultimately, however, this meaning cannot be grasped by merely intellectual means, for it supersedes essentially—or to speak more specifically—dimensionally, man's capacity as a finite being. I try to indicate this fact by the
term super-meaning. This meaning necessarily transcends man and his world and, therefore, cannot be approached by merely rational processes. It is rather accessible to an act of commitment which emerges out of the depth and center of man’s personality and is thus rooted in his total existence. In one word, what we have to deal with is not intellectual or rational process, but a wholly existential act.... (Frankl, 1990, p.65)

This super-meaning directly contradicts the assumption of many existential psychologists that there is no meaning in the world apart from what is created by each individual. It provides an interesting theoretical alternative for considering religious beliefs as located in another dimension, rather than categorizing them as illusions which may need to be removed to live authentically.

2.2.2.2 Implications for Change

Frankl’s own experience of the discovery of meaning is a dramatic story of an existential crisis (imprisonment in a concentration camp) which helped him to find meaning in his life. Most of the clinical stories which he related are equally dramatic—the client encounters a life crisis which disturbs his/her meaning in life, but suddenly comes to see the meaning in his/her life with the aid of the therapist. In this sense Frankl’s theory may be seen as primarily an existential perspective.

Frankl also stated, however, that life does not have only a single overarching meaning, but is composed of many incidents throughout one’s life which make it meaningful. He compared it to the meaning of a film, which can be understood in its entirety when the film is over, but which is experienced as a series of moments. In this sense his theory may be seen as allowing for a process of discovering one’s meaning in life. It is difficult to classify this movement as a life-transitional perspective, however, because he does not make any suggestions as to how meaning may change over the life-span. It can be said that Frankl does show some recognition of the process of discovering meaning in life, rather than simply a single event transforming an individual’s life.
Finally, there is also a developmental aspect to Frankl’s theory because he explicitly stated that self-transcendence is the highest form of meaning in life. He did not list other forms of meaning in life nor describe how they might precede self-transcendence. He also did not discuss how the creative, experiential, and attitudinal paths relate to self-transcendence. Self-transcendence itself is not as clearly defined as it could be. Thus, it is difficult to build a developmental model out of Frankl’s theory, although there is nothing in his theory which precludes this possibility.

2.2.2.3 Possible Differences for Some Women

There are two aspects of Frankl’s theory of meaning in life which I find particularly relevant for older women. The first aspect is that one of the paths to meaning in life is through the experience of loving others. Frankl wrote:

The second way of finding a meaning in life is by experiencing something—such as goodness, truth and beauty—by experiencing nature and culture or, last but not least, by experiencing another human being in his very uniqueness—by loving him. (Frankl, 1984, p.134)

Frankl described what love means from a logotherapeutic viewpoint. Unfortunately, he did not clarify precisely how love can provide someone with meaning in life. His statement about the importance of love in the discovery of meaning contrasts with other existential psychologists who seem to emphasize the importance of the active pursuit of meaning rather than experiencing or loving (Moody, 1991).

A second aspect of Frankl’s theory which may be especially relevant to older women is that he acknowledged the importance of being able to look back on past achievements. Although he believed that an individual has an ongoing meaning in life to fulfill, he acknowledged the importance of being able to review one’s life and to see meaning in the way one has lived it. This approach allows for more reflection and does not insist on continuous creativity or activity. Moody (1991) has pointed out that some of the more recent views on successful aging demand that an individual be highly active and involved in society, and do not seem to respect an individual’s possible preference for contemplation or isolation.
Thus, Frankl's view offers a contrast to some of the more recent theories of aging (e.g., Carlsen, 1991).

2.2.2.4 Markers of Frankl's View of Meaning in Life

Some characteristics of a person who possessed Frankl's version of meaning in life might include:

1. A life experience which caused one to examine one's life in light of the universal givens of pain, guilt, and transitoriness.

2. A belief in some type of cosmic meaning in life as a whole.

3. A discovery of one's own unique meaning in life with a resultant sense of purpose. This discovery would likely be prompted by a life experience, and the unique meaning would likely reflect one's view of cosmic meaning.

4. In addition to a sense of cosmic meaning, and an overall personal meaning in one's life, there would be an ongoing sense of meaning in everyday moments.

5. Ultimately one would be moving towards self-transcendence.

2.3 Life Transition Theories

2.3.1 Introduction

Life transition theories are focused on the impact that expected life events have on changes in meaning in life. In our culture there are several transitions which commonly occur during adulthood. These include completing secondary education, finding a job, getting married, having children, raising children, and retirement. Other events, which were once less common, are now becoming more common such as re-education, second or third careers, divorce, and remarriage. Each of these life events may be cause for change in an individual's meaning in life.

I perceive life transition theories to be different from existential theories in four ways. The first difference is that life transition theories attempt to discuss changes in meaning in life from a life-span perspective, rather than focusing on an isolated event in an individual's life. The focus is on the whole course of an individual's life rather than a single point. A second difference is that life transition theories postulate numerous changes in meaning in life in
response to life transitions, rather than a single dramatic shift. A third difference is the individual’s perspective on the life event. The same life event may be viewed as an existential crisis by one individual and a life transition by another individual. Thus the boundary between life transitions and existential crises is somewhat fuzzy. A fourth difference is that in the life transition theories the life event does not necessarily have to include a confrontation with the existential givens.

2.3.2 Erikson

2.3.2.1 Assumptions about Meaning in Life

Erikson’s theory (Erikson, 1982; Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986) is not obviously concerned with issues of meaning in life. In reading his book Vital Involvement, however, I became convinced that Erikson and his colleagues (1986) were discussing changes in life purpose in response to life transitions. For example, intimacy is presumed to be a developmental stage, but it can also be seen as the predominant focus of meaning in life for an individual who is attempting to establish an intimate relationship. Thus for the purposes of this review, I classify Erikson’s theory as a life-transitions theory, and I presume that the stages to which he refers could be seen as the primary source of meaning in life for an individual.

The four adult stages which may be relevant to this discussion of the development of meaning in life are identity vs. identity confusion, intimacy and love, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair. Identity vs. identity confusion is a late adolescent stage in which the individual struggles to develop a sense of who he/she is. Redekopp (1990) argued that this period of identity formation is crucial to a later development of meaning in life because the individual must have a sense of who he/she is before he/she can develop a world view or a sense of purpose within that world. The next stage, intimacy and love, is a theme which Erikson believed to be relatively more important earlier in life than in later years. For some individuals, then, intimacy and love may be an important arena of meaning in life in their early adult years. The next stage of life, generativity vs. stagnation, concerns the desire to teach and to nurture the younger generations. This concern may be more
relevant to many people at mid-life than it has been at other stages of their lives, and as such would be a more important source of meaning than the earlier intimacy concerns and the later concerns with integrity. The final stage in Erikson’s theory is that of integrity vs. despair and it involves a re-experiencing of all the previous life themes, an attempt at integration of one’s life experiences, and a struggle to maintain an integral sense of self despite possible bodily and mental decline. With the onset of aging and the approach of death, achieving integrity and wisdom might be more important than it had been at previous points in the life-span, and therefore a natural focus of one’s energies in creating meaning in life.

There is some overlap between Erikson’s stages and Frankl’s views about meaning in life. Erikson’s stage of intimacy and love is similar to Frankl’s experiential path. Erikson’s stage of generativity vs. stagnation could also be seen as a striving for self-transcendence. Erikson’s final stage of integrity vs. despair is similar to Frankl’s attitudinal path. If one included Erikson’s earlier stage of industry vs. inferiority, which is broadly comparable to Frankl’s creative path, it is possible to find a great deal of overlap between Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development and Frankl’s theory of meaning in life.

Because Erikson did not speak directly about meaning in life, his assumptions about meaning in life are not clear. If one accepts the argument that Erikson’s stages could be seen as themes around which one’s meaning in life revolves during certain periods of the life-span, then one may also infer some assumptions about meaning in life. Because Erikson’s model is life-transitional, and dependent upon the sequencing of life events in a predictable fashion, one assumption is that meaning in life will be difficult to find at a secondary stage if one’s meaning in life has not been satisfactorily resolved at an earlier stage. For example, if an individual has not been able to develop intimate relationships or to find meaning in those relationships, then it will be more difficult to find meaning in life through generativity. This view contrasts with Frankl’s view, which allows an individual to find meaning in life through the creative, experiential, or attitudinal paths, without a judgment on prior necessity.

Another assumption in Erikson’s theory is that one’s overall life meaning does not crystallize until old age. In old age the primary task is a struggle to develop wisdom. Given my definition of meaning in life as being composed of a sense of order and a sense of
purpose, it can be assumed that an individual could have a sense of purpose during his/her life, but that the sense of order would be developing and changing over time and would only reach maturity in old age.

2.3.2.2 Implications for Change

Erikson’s theory is usually referred to as developmental because it assumes a fixed order of psychosocial stages and is modeled along Freud’s psychosexual stages. Each stage is also necessary for the previous stage to fully develop and in this sense the stages are hierarchical. I have classified his theory as life transitional, however, because I am using his developmental stages as thematic markers of meaning in life, and this usage echoes Erikson’s (1986) later development of his work. Thus my use of Erikson’s theory in the development of meaning in life does not follow a developmental model as much as it does a life-transitional model. It still presupposes the importance of life events occurring in a certain sequence, and relatively on time.

2.3.2.3 Possible Differences for Some Women

The applicability of Erikson’s theory to women’s development has been questioned by several authors (Franz & White, 1985; Hassan & Bar-Yam, 1987; Lewittes, 1982). There are two main criticisms: (1) Erikson assumed a fixed set of developmental stages which fit more closely with traditional male development than with traditional female development; and (2) Erikson placed developing agency before developing intimacy when agency and communion may be thought of as intertwined in development throughout the life-span. There are two implications of these criticisms. The first implication is that we should not look for women’s meaning in life to relate to Erikson’s proposed sequence of stages because the sequence, and possibly the stages, for men are different from women. A second implication is that we may look for meanings in women’s lives that reflect more agentic or communal paths, but we should not be surprised to find that both agency and communion are important sources of meaning in life to some women throughout their entire lives.
2.3.2.4 Markers of Erikson’s View of Meaning in Life

In this section I review the markers of changes in meaning in life over the life-span using Erikson’s stages as thematic markers rather than as actual stages of meaning in life. Given these assumptions, the following markers may be apparent in an individual’s life whose changes in meaning in life have followed Erikson’s stages:

1. The individual would experience his/her central focus of meaning in life to shift depending on his/her life transitions.

2. A possible ordering of those shifts of the focus of meaning in life would be from identity to intimacy to generativity to integrity.

3. The final stage of life, integrity vs. despair, would be focused on developing an overall sense of order and purpose for one’s life.

2.3.3 Baumeister

2.3.3.1 Assumptions about Meaning in Life

Baumeister (1991) believed that the meaning of constructs, the meaning of sentences, and the meanings of life were all similar in that meaning refers to “ideas that connect things together.” Meanings of life are a complex form of meanings, as opposed to the meanings of words, but both meanings are on the same continuum, rather than being two separate constructs. The complexity of a meaning is dependent on the web of connections associated with the meaning. The greater the number of strands or associations within a web of meaning, the greater the complexity. Baumeister stated that very few people have an articulated philosophy of life that covers the bulk of existential questions. There is, however, still meaning in people’s lives:

It is clearly not necessary to have a fully worked out, coherent, and logically consistent notion of the meaning of life. People are quite capable of living happily in modern society without any coherent or explicit philosophy of life. But that does not entail that their lives lack meaning or are random, chaotic, senseless jumbles. Perhaps people are satisfied with fragmented, specific answers to specific needs, and they simply don’t work everything out to a fully elaborated
system. Their lives may have plenty of meaning, even if they couldn’t articulate it all as a philosophical system. (Baumeister, 1991, p.29)

Baumeister proposed that in order for people to have a sense of meaning in their lives, four basic needs for meaning must be met: purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth. Purpose is “the need to be able to interpret present events in relation to future events. Goals and fulfillments are the two main types (extrinsic and intrinsic) of purposes” (Baumeister, 1991, p.56). A key aspect of purpose is to feel that one’s activities are oriented towards a purpose, and that there is some reason for continuing those activities. These activities may be directed toward a goal, which is generally extrinsic, or toward a sense of personal fulfillment, which is generally intrinsic.

The second need is for value, that is, to be able to justify and legitimate one’s actions: “People need to regard their actions as right and good. They desire to justify both past and present actions” (Baumeister, 1991, p.56). Baumeister emphasized that societal and cultural moral systems provided the information and the structure within which an individual would judge his/her behaviour or activity to be right or wrong, or of value.

The third need is for a sense of efficacy, “that is a sense of being strong and capable of making a difference or having some impact on the world” (Baumeister, 1991, p.56). In addition to having goals, and a sense of value, individuals also need to believe that they can achieve goals, and that they have some measure of control over their destiny.

The fourth need is to have a basis for self-worth, “which includes both self-respect and some claim to the respect of others” (Baumeister, 1991, p.56). He argued that people need to have a sense of meaning that allows them to feel positive self value.

Baumeister argued that if these four needs were met, a person could find meaning in life. He also argued that meaning in life was most resilient if there were several paths to meaning: “In general, people are more secure if their lives furnish multiple means of satisfying each need for meaning. Reliance on a single source leaves you vulnerable to threats and losses” (Baumeister, 1991, p.46).
2.3.3.2 Implications for Change

Baumeister wrote of adding life meanings, sustaining life meanings, and subtracting life meanings. When new meanings (such as getting married, starting a new job, or embracing a new faith) were voluntarily added, Baumeister noted that the literature suggested a period of euphoria, happiness, bliss, or a sense of well-being followed.

In any role, task, or belief system, there are always negative events that occur which lessen an individual’s confidence or satisfaction in the source of meanings. When these negative events occur, an individual must find some way to defuse the dissonance which is created. Baumeister suggested that people sustain illusions by ignoring, rationalizing, or justifying isolated negative events:

People sustain their illusions by ignoring contradictory information and its implications....It is fairly clear that people can endure isolated events that run contrary to their beliefs, as long as these do not form a coherent, powerful, and enduring pattern. (p.300)

A life meaning can be sustained, as long as there is no evident trend that the life meaning is contradictory to one’s larger belief system. Discontent emerges, “when these contradictory events link together to form a large pattern of negative, dissonant thought.” (p.304) Baumeister labeled this process the crystallization of discontent.

When people recall the reasons why they made a life change, they frequently speak of a focal incident that prompted them to make a change. The focal incident, while sometimes minor, is generally symbolic of the individual’s discontent. After a decision is made to make a life change, rewriting must occur to justify the decision to change. Just as an individual constructs a story to sustain a life role as meaningful, likewise this story must be deconstructed to justify leaving the life role. It generally involves accentuating the bad, and downplaying the good.

Baumeister stated that following the loss of a source of meaning, a meaning vacuum is created:
The removal of a major source of meaning in life does tend to produce at least a temporary feeling of emptiness, ambiguity, emotional confusion, and other signs of a lack of meaning. This state can be described as a meaning vacuum. (p.312)

A meaning vacuum is both the experience of the loss of a source of meaning, and the negative emotional experience associated with the loss. He suggested that the greater the loss of meaning, the larger the vacuum which is created. Negative emotional experiences would thus be greater when a primary source of meaning is lost. Self-worth or self-esteem is also often negatively affected during this time of role change and of meaning vacuum.

In order to adjust to the loss of a source of life meaning, “One needs either to stretch one’s remaining sources of meaning to make up the deficit, or to find new, replacement sources of meaning. Often the person’s adjustment is a mixture of both” (p.318). People who are able to anticipate the life role changes, and begin to make changes to ease the transition will likely experience the least amount of meaning vacuum. An example is recognizing that one’s marriage will soon be ending, and beginning another relationship to ease the transition. Baumeister reviewed literature suggesting that this was a common strategy. Baumeister also noted that transitions are rarely complete. Many ties remain to the former life role, and a continuity is maintained: “Life change must be understood as the alteration rather than the elimination of meanings from one’s life. Meaningful links do change substantially, but in most cases they cannot be completely dissolved or shattered” (p.325).

Baumeister’s model of change had elements of existential theories as well as life transition theories. Baumeister conveyed an understanding of the importance of focal incidents precipitating life change, which is similar to the existentialists. His description of the process of cognitive changes surrounding loss of life meaning is also similar to the existentialists. His examination of life role changes, and his placement of those within a life-span perspective, however, is more akin to life transition theories. In addition, he acknowledged the continuous change which life brings, which is also similar to life transition models. Finally, focal incidents do not necessarily include confrontation with existential
givens. For these reasons, Baumeister’s may be considered a life transition theory, but similarities to an existential model should be noted.

2.3.3.3 Possible Differences for Some Women

Baumeister’s theory of meanings in life, and change in meanings, is explicitly based on research into life transitions, for both men and women. There are no obvious limitations to his theory for meaning in the lives of women.

One general limitation of Baumeister’s theory was pointed out by Thompson (1993) who noted that it was not clear which aspects of meaning were antecedents and which were consequents. When Baumeister presented the four defining features of meanings--purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth--they all seemed to be components of life meanings, with little differentiation of their roles in meaning. Later in the book, Baumeister suggested that a lowered sense of self-worth would likely result when a life meaning was lost. This suggests that self-worth is a consequence of purpose. It would be helpful to have a clearer understanding of the relationship between the four components of meanings of life.

2.3.3.4 Markers of Baumeister’s View of Meaning in Life

1. Life meaning is found in a variety of sources. There will be more than one source of meaning for each individual. An individual who has life meanings will also have a sense of purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth.

2. Meanings will be sustained through a process of ignoring or rationalizing inconsistencies or negative aspects of the source of meaning.

3. Changes in life meanings will occur voluntarily when an individual becomes aware of a pattern of inconsistencies or negative aspects of the source of meaning. This process is called the crystallization of discontent.

4. A focal incident, symbolic of the crystallization of discontent, often provides the impetus for making the change.

5. Any change in life meaning, voluntary or involuntary, will be accompanied by a meaning vacuum. The size of the vacuum created will be dependent on the significance of the lost life meaning to the individual. Individuals will attempt to ease the transition by creating continuity and by exploring new avenues of meaning.
2.4 Developmental Theories

2.4.1 Introduction

In this section I include theories of the development of meaning in life. These are theories which postulate a progression towards a type of meaning in life which is in some sense more complex, advanced, or superior to a previous type of meaning in life.

2.4.2 Carlsen

2.4.2.1 Assumptions about Meaning in Life

Carlsen (1988, 1991) conceived of meaning in life as ranging from the concrete to the abstract:

What I find helpful is to conceptualize meaning on a ladder of abstraction, which suggests steps from the simplest to the most complex, from the concrete basics of life to the abstract reaches of the spiritual and divine (whatever that means to you). What gives meaning to aging, then, can be traced from the practical, day-to-day processes of eating and sleeping, of learning, working or playing, into the interactive processes of personal relationships, and on to more overarching perspectives on the world as a community of interconnection and the transcendent as a movement into mystery. (1991, p.3)

I find this approach quite appealing because it removes some of the difficulty of defining meaning in life. Meaning in life becomes, quite simply, anything which gives meaning to an individual’s life. She stated in another book, however, that the: “broader and more inclusive our referents of meaning, the less vulnerable we are to loss, say, of a relationship, a job, or a specific area of personal growth and intention” (1988, p.22). Carlsen believed that anything can provide meaning in life, but some types of meaning in life may be more adaptive than other types.

Creativity was a central theme in Carlsen’s writings. Meaning-making was seen as a creative process in which we all have the potential to engage. In keeping with her
constructivist viewpoint, she believed that meaning in life was created, not discovered. She also believed that the creation of meaning was an exciting and joyful process.

2.4.2.2 Implications for Change

Carlsen’s theory has elements of a developmental model and an existential model. Generally an individual’s search for a new way of constructing his/her world is triggered by some type of life event or life crisis. Carlsen believed, however, that these crises can be opportunities for development, not simply changes in one’s meaning-making, but movements in an upward direction:

From my perspective, genuine developmental transformation moves the person through increasingly inclusive and complex cyclings and recyclings of meaning and personal construction. Within each recycling there is renewed opportunity to rework previous challenges in the service of the new. (1991, p.45)

Carlsen was explicit about the direction in which she attempted to move her clients. She listed five values which guide her interventions in meaning-making:

1. wisdom and integrity over stupidity, ignorance, and despair;
2. generativity and care over self-aggrandizement and narcissistic preoccupation;
3. open-mindedness over rigid, closed thinking;
4. a willingness to entertain new ideas over opinionated self-righteousness;
5. transcendent relationship over the extremes of either self or other. (1991, p.45)

The first two values of wisdom and generativity are obviously borrowed from Erikson’s (1982) view of development. Striving for wisdom has also been noted as being important in the life review process. Generativity, or caring for others, has been found as a theme in Frankl’s theory, and in some of the feminist critiques of other developmental theories (Hassan & Bar-Yam, 1987). Thus these two values certainly resonate with other theorists’ conceptualizations.
Her emphasis on open-mindedness and a willingness to entertain new ideas is a predominant theme throughout her work and reflects her valuing of creativity. In this respect her work is very similar to Basseches (1984) who suggested that dialectical thinking was a more advanced form of thinking than formal thinking, and that it was the most adaptive approach to the ongoing process of making sense of our lives. Carlsen stated that she had been influenced by the dialectic approach, and she too believed that it is more adaptive than rigidity or singularity of thought. Kegan’s (1982) emphasis on one’s ability to see from more than one perspective also contains elements of this belief.

I find Carlsen’s assertion of the importance of transcendent relationships rather than the extremes of the self or other to be intriguing. Unfortunately she did not directly expand on what she meant by this. I would presume that part of her emphasis is on a balance between being involved in the lives of others and developing a sense of self. Precisely what she means by transcendent, however, is unclear. It may refer to Frankl’s notion of self-transcendence, or to some type of spiritual transcendence from the everyday world of self and relationships. In any case, Carlsen seems neither to advocate a losing of oneself in others, nor a process of self-actualization, as a road to the ultimate meaning in life.

Overall, Carlsen’s theory is a combination of an existential model and a developmental model. Most of the crises in meaning in life are triggered by a life crisis rather than by predictable life events. The life crises, however, can be opportunities for development—not development through a series of stages, but development towards a creative, flexible, and transcendent meaning-making and meaning in life.

2.4.2.3 Possible Differences for Some Women

As stated previously Carlsen placed great value on creativity, open-mindedness, and flexibility in thought. These values are predominant themes in her writings. Although these values may fit the developmental paths of some women, I suspect that there are many women for whom a fixed religious system and/or a fixed cultural system have provided a strong sense of meaning or purpose in their lives. I am rather uncomfortable with imposing a developmental standard of flexibility on a person who has been taught, believed, and possibly
taught others that adherence to one school of religious thought is the path to the highest meaning in life. This statement is not intended to devalue Carlsen’s theory for some people, but simply to point out that it may not be an appropriate standard for all people.

2.4.2.4 Markers of Carlsen’s View of Meaning in Life

1. The individual will have experienced life events which have challenged his/her meaning-making perspective.

2. In response to these life crises the individual will attempt to adapt or change how he/she makes sense of the world.

3. The direction of the changes will be towards increased wisdom, increased generativity, flexibility in thought, open-mindedness, and transcendence.

4. These changes will not occur in fixed stages, but will occur repeatedly throughout the individual’s life-span.

2.4.3 Fowler

2.4.3.1 Assumptions about Meaning in Life

Fowler (1981, 1983) proposed six stages of faith that an individual may progress through during a life-span. Although faith is commonly connoted with religion, Fowler’s conception of faith is directly linked with meaning in life:

One characteristic all human beings have in common is that we can’t live without some sense that life is meaningful. And it’s this notion—that we are meaning-making, meaning-maintaining creatures—I have in mind when I suggest that faith is a kind of activity in which all of us are engaged. (1983, pp.58-59)

Fowler stated that many people no longer have faith in religious traditions, but are now centering their faith in “a career, a country, an institution, a family, money, success, or even oneself” (p.59).

There are two other components of Fowler’s concept of faith. Faith does not refer simply to the beliefs that one holds, but rather refers to pledging loyalty or an oath of commitment. Faith is action rather than a static entity, which involves an emotional commitment as well as an intellectual assent. A second point which Fowler made about faith
is that it is partly composed of our ultimate environment. Our ultimate environment refers to how we see life and what we strive toward. It is shaped by our earliest childhood experiences, and it continues to be changed by life events. Fowler stated that there is, therefore, no person who does not have faith because we all have an ultimate environment.

Fowler’s theory was strongly influenced by the developmental models of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Selman (as described in Fowler, 1981). His stages of faith include the dimensions of Piaget’s form of logic, Kohlberg’s form of moral judgment, and Selman’s stages of perspective taking. He also included the dimensions of bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function. Symbolic function is of particular importance because it refers to the role of our imagination and the images that we use to construct our worlds. Symbolic function adds a creative element to meaning in life which is missing in other theories. Fowler believed that affect and imagination are essential components of faith.

Fowler’s stages are the prestage of primal faith (infancy), intuitive-projective faith (early childhood), mythic-literal faith (childhood and beyond), synthetic-conventional faith (adolescence and beyond), individuative-reflective faith (young adulthood and beyond), conjunctive faith (mid-life and beyond), and universalizing faith (mid-life and beyond). Mythic-literal faith is the first stage of faith that might be found in adulthood. In the mythic-literal stage one becomes able to think logically using categories of causality, space, and time. One is also able to see others’ perspectives and to describe life meaning in stories. In the synthetic-conventional stage an adolescent (typically) integrates various types of religious beliefs and values into a sense of identity. The beliefs and values are generally accepted without being reflected upon or questioned. In the individuative-reflective stage, one’s beliefs are subjected to self-scrutiny and reflection. An understanding of the self in relation to others and an increasing awareness of the social system influence choices about lifestyle and belief systems. The conjunctive stage of faith allows one to appreciate paradoxes and to see multiple interpretations of reality as being acceptable. The universalizing stage of faith is characterized by being rooted in a sense of oneness with the “power of being.” There is a
sense of self-transcendence and a striving to overcome division, oppression, and brutality in the world.

Fowler’s stages of faith share many similarities with Kegan and Carlson’s models of meaning-making. Fowler believed that one must become disembedded from a previous way of knowing in order for a new way of meaning-making to emerge. This view is very similar to Kegan’s theory. Both theorists relied heavily on Piaget’s work as a cognitive basis for what might be expected at each stage of meaning-making. Kegan, Carlson, and Fowler all believed that development or progression occurs when one moves from less flexible to more flexible forms of thought, from a singular perspective to multiple perspectives, and from a narrow viewpoint to a complex understanding of a situation.

Fowler differs from Kegan and Carlson, however, in that he theorized that the ultimate stage of faith involved a rootedness in the oneness of being that completes the decentration of self. Fowler believed that this transcendence of self will be accompanied by beliefs in love and justice, which provide the basis for a new form of moral reasoning. Using the values of love and justice seems to move this stage into one which combines both form and content. This use of values, rather than strictly form, is thus somewhat different than Kegan and Carlson. This spiritual dimension is reminiscent of Frankl’s theory of the importance of cosmic meaning in life. Thus Fowler’s theory does not remain completely tied to the form of thought associated with the progressive stages of faith, but also adds a spiritual content dimension which is lacking in other theories.

2.4.3.2 Implications for Change

Fowler’s theory is obviously primarily developmental. He theorized that there is a progression of meaning in life from lower stages to higher stages. There is the developmental goal of universalizing faith to be obtained, which is believed to be more advanced than earlier stages of faith. The attainment of a previous stage is necessary for movement into the next stage.

There is, however, an element of the existential view in Fowler’s theory. The precipitating factor for movement into a higher stage is a life event which calls into question
values or beliefs which had been held without question by the individual. This mechanism is similar to an existential life crisis. Fowler stated that a crisis may: “provide the sort of critical incident and reflective moment that causes a kind of disembedding of values that can lead to a new stage where persons consciously choose new values and assume responsibility for them” (Fowler, 1983, p.59). Thus although Fowler’s theory is developmental, the precipitating factor of change is similar to an existential life crisis.

2.4.3.3 Possible Differences for Some Women

I believe that there are no obvious difficulties in applying Fowler’s theory of faith to the development of women. As I mentioned in discussing Carlsen’s theory, it does strike me as rather troublesome that a theory should insist on a recognition of the plurality of beliefs as being necessary for the most advanced stage of faith. I think it might be possible that a woman could have a self-transcendent meaning in life (one of the characteristics of the universalizing faith) without a belief system that allowed for polarities and paradox. In Fowler’s theory, however, an allowance for paradox must come before self-transcendence. I suspect that for some women this pattern does not fit.

2.4.3.4 Markers of Fowler’s View of Meaning in Life

1. Every person has a meaning in life which is reflected in his/her conception of the ultimate environment.

2. An individual’s changes in meaning in life will be in response to life events which have challenged the previous stage of faith.

3. The stages of faith will follow the order given by Fowler: mythic-literal, synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive, and universalizing. A rare individual will achieve the highest stage. Many adults remain at the synthetic-conventional or individuative-reflective stages.

4. Although the form of faith will follow these stages, the content of one’s faith is not specified until the final stage. Thus, the individual’s meaning in life may be religious in orientation but may also be one’s family, career, or country.
2.5 Narrative Approach

2.5.1 Introduction

The narrative approach is not an explicit theory of meaning in life, but rather an approach to the study of the meaning which people create as they build their life stories. This approach encourages the study of the narratives or the life stories themselves, not as historical data, but as texts which by their very construction, form, and content reveal the identity and meaning of the individual. An examination of a personal narrative thus reveals much about a person’s sense of self, view of the world, and meaning in life. As such it is a fruitful approach for exploring an individual’s meaning in life.

2.5.2 McAdams’ Narrative Approach

2.5.2.1 Assumptions about Meaning in Life

McAdams (1994) believed that we are all narrators, and that we narrate our lives as we live them: “These “personal myths” that we construct, are an “internalized, integrative story [that we have)...constructed over time to provide [our lives]...with a sense of unity and purpose” (p.746). McAdams focused on how these personal myths provide us with a sense of identity. Our earliest experiences provide us with the raw material (tone, imagery, and theme) upon which to build our identities, but our culture and additional life experiences are also influential in constructing identity. Identity and meaning in life are closely linked in McAdams’ approach, and may even be synonymous. Identity is the process of creating a story of the self, which then provides unity and purpose to our lives. Identity consists of an ideological setting, nuclear episodes, and imagoes.

The process of developing an ideological setting is often begun in adolescence. During this time questions about spirituality, ethics, and existential realities are asked, and preliminary answers are used to develop a “backdrop of belief and value that situates the story within a particular ethical and religious location” (McAdams, 1994, p.755). McAdams believed that during adolescence, we begin to have a sense of history and a sense of future. In order to incorporate past events with a future self, “nuclear episodes” that are seen as
crucial turning points in an individual’s life are remembered and integrated into the self. “Nuclear episodes are perceived high points, low points, beginning points, ending points, and turning points in one’s past, each of which stands out in bold print in the evolving life story” (McAdams, 1994, p.755). They are significant events in understanding the past self and its relation to the future self.

In early adulthood, we begin to explore the characters or imagoes of our life stories. Imagoes are the characters of self that we use in constructing stories that form our identity. Imagoes are stock characters, frequently uni-dimensional, which allow us to explore various parts of the self by playing one imago against another. The “caring mother” imago might be played against the “aggressive entrepreneur” in an attempt to resolve conflict of the self about varying roles. The nature of the imagoes chosen to represent the self reveal the themes which are central to our personal meaning. McAdams has explored the presence of the themes of agency and communion in life stories, and has noted that these themes in the stories are predictive of intimacy or power motivations (McAdams, 1994).

In summary, by understanding an individual’s life story, and in particular the components of ideological setting, nuclear episodes, and imagoes, the identity of an individual is revealed. Identity is closely related to personal meaning because McAdams believed that identity embues a life with a sense of unity and purpose. Unity and purpose are obviously highly correlated with the definition of personal meaning that we have been using in this literature review.

2.5.2.2 Implications for Change

One aspect of change within McAdams’ theory is centered in the life stages. He believed that the life story would change over time in the centrality of three different colourings: tone, imagery, and theme. McAdams stated that one of the earliest differentiating features of a narrative is its tone. The tone of a story may be optimistic or pessimistic depending on the resolution of some of the earliest issues of trust in caregivers. This tone quality carries through in the development of the story as a future attitude of cynicism or hope. Later in the preschool and early school years there is the development of
imagery. When the narrative is examined during this period, it is often dominated with symbols and imagery. Logical, rational thought has not yet emerged, and symbols and imagery are mixed at will, without regard for their logicality or sequencing. These early symbols are later submerged, but continue to act as an important backdrop to the life story. As formal operational thought emerges, there is an ability to sequence a story, to create a beginning, middle, and an end. There is also the emerging ability to develop characters who act according to their motivating themes. Themes of agency and communion, or of adventure and love, become more pronounced, and create a plot. The development of tone, imagery, and theme set the stage for the development of identity, and its increasing differentiation throughout life.

McAdams believed that our life stories would continue to change throughout our lifespan, at times undergoing dramatic and tumultuous change, and at other times remaining relatively stable. He also believed, however, that the development of identity should “move in the direction of increasingly good narrative form” (p. 765). The standards of form include coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation, reconciliation, and generative integration. Coherence refers to the extent to which a life story makes sense. The events are linked together in a manner which is orderly or causal. Coherence is balanced by openness, however, because a story which is too neat precludes openness to new experiences. Openness to change allows for flexibility and adaptability to new situations. Credibility refers to the extent that we, the listener or reader, judge the story to be based in the reality in which we all live. “A good story is rich in characterization, plot, and theme” (p.765), and this is the criterion of differentiation. It is the extent to which there are subtleties in the plot, depth to the characters, and intricacies in the themes. As the story becomes increasingly differentiated or complex, reconciliation may also be sought between conflicting plots, characters, or themes in the story. McAdams believed this aspect of life stories may be particularly important in mid-life and beyond. Finally, as the life story is told and enacted within the context of society, a good story benefits both the individual constructing the story, and the society in which the story is told. This is generative integration.
2.5.2.3 Possible Differences for Some Women

McAdams’ theory, with its conjoint emphasis on agency and communion, is particularly appropriate for examining the meaning in life of women. As was previously mentioned in discussing Erikson’s theory, one of the criticisms of previous models of development has been their emphasis on the primacy of agency (Hassan & Bar-Yam, 1987). McAdams’ theory honours the importance of communion and agency, and thus reflects an important element of meaning in life that has been neglected in other theories.

2.5.2.4 Markers of McAdams’ View of Meaning in Life

1. Increased meaning in life would be evident in narratives which seemed to have coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation, reconciliation, and generative integration.
3. Rationale for the Study

The purpose of this research project was to explore older women’s views and experiences of their meaning in life. I wanted to understand the lived experience of meaning in life for women who were not necessarily psychologists or philosophers, but simply women who lived their lives and created or discovered meaning as their lives unfolded. From this deepened understanding, my second goal was to develop a structure of meaning in life that reflected the women’s experiences. Thematic/structural analysis was used to analyze the interviews for the themes and structures of meaning in life, and upon that analysis, a structure of meaning in life was proposed. A third goal was to understand how women viewed change in their meaning, and the causes of those changes. I wanted to know if they perceived change where psychological theories would suggest change, or if they perceived stability in those areas, or if they identified change in areas where change would be unexpected from the theories. I also wanted to propose my own understanding, from an analysis of all the women’s experiences, of the process of change or stability in meaning in life. Comparative analysis was used to engage with the theories and the women’s accounts, and through an iterative process to emerge with an increased understanding of some important similarities and differences of the women’s stories and the theories.
4. Method

4.1 Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

The first goal of this study was to increase understanding of the lived experience of meaning in life. The significance of understanding a lived experience can be seen as lacking credibility or worthiness within a positivist perspective. Social research's current emphasis on explanation and generalization has strong philosophical roots, but understanding has a philosophical pedigree as well:

Dilthey, for instance, emphasized the role of understanding (Verstehen), contrasting it with the pre-Kantian, Cartesian practices of explanation (Erklärung). More important, however, was Dilthey's attention to the concept of Erlebnis. Roughly translated as "lived experience"...[it] relates to the intimate relationship between the inner and outer states and consequences of human existence." (Hamilton, 1994, p.64)

The goal of increased understanding of lived experience is best met by a qualitative approach. Because the secondary goals of describing a phenomenon, and generating some explanations regarding the experience of change or stability, can also be met through a qualitative study, a decision was made to adopt a qualitative approach (Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

4.2 The Research Paradigm

The decision as to which qualitative approach to use was a process. My internal tension in attempting to choose a qualitative approach, and to understand the implications of that choice for the method, analysis, and presentation of the study, was aptly summarized by Denzin and Lincoln in their introduction to The Handbook of Qualitative Research:

It is important to remember that the field of qualitative research is defined by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations. This tension works back and forth between the broad, doubting postmodern sensibility and the more certain, more traditional positivist, postpositivist, and naturalistic conceptions of this project. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.15)
This tension in the field is also an internal reality for some researchers, and for myself. I found myself struggling with a research paradigm in flux. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined and discussed the importance of a researcher’s paradigm. The set of beliefs which a researcher holds is assumed to affect the choice of research question, the choice of research design, and the choice of interpretation and presentation of a research project.

These principles combine beliefs about ontology (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?), epistemology (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and methodology (How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?). (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.13)

My research paradigm, and the one which this research project most closely followed, was constructivist, although it also contained elements of a feminist paradigm. I assumed that there are multiple realities, that I, as a researcher, co-create knowledge with participants, and that I gain knowledge of the world through naturalistic methods. In particular, the knowledge which is constructed by myself and participants can be interpreted through a dialogue with the interview data, myself, and the literature review.

4.3 Overall Design of the Research Project

Eight older women who were residents of Saskatchewan were interviewed regarding their meanings in life. These interviews were transcribed and were then thematically and structurally analyzed for the content and form of meaning in life. This was followed by the interpretive construction of smoothed first-person narratives. The interpretive construction included an immersion in the participants’ constructions of meaning in life, and involved searching for an understanding of how the process of change or stability in each of the themes of meaning in life occurred for each participant. In the next step of comparative analysis, the course of change or stability was compared to each of the reviewed theories, as another source of information from which to further understand the women’s stories. Finally, a cross-comparison of the women’s stories was completed, to look for overall patterns in the process of change or stability in meaning in life, and for similarity in themes. These larger patterns were then compared again to our current psychological literature on meaning in life.
4.4 Biases

4.4.1 Working the Hyphen

Because I was attempting to approach the women's stories with an open mind toward their experiences of meaning in life, it was important to acknowledge, and as much as possible "bracket" (Colaizzi, 1978) my own experiences. This process is also similar to McCracken's term of "manufacturing distance" from the literature and from my own cultural perspective (McCracken, 1988). It is, of course, impossible to bracket truly our experiences: Postructuralists and postmodernists have contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.12)

Fine (1994) described this process in a slightly different fashion:

Self and Other are knotily entangled. This relationship, as lived between researchers and informants, is typically obscured in social science texts. Despite denials, qualitative researchers are always implicated at the hyphen. When we opt, as has been the tradition, simply to write about those who have been Othered, we deny the hyphen....By working the hyphen, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations. (Fine, 1994, p.72)

In keeping with a qualitative tradition, I identify some of the conscious assumptions, from the literature and from my life context and world view, that I carried into this research project.

There were several prior assumptions about meaning in life that I made as a result of the interface between personal experiences and my reading of the literature. I expected that there would be change of varying degrees, form, and content in the women's meanings in their lives. From a structural point of view, I believed that meaning in life consisted of both a cognitive component (world view) and a motivational component (sense of purpose).
believed that, for many of the women, Carlsen’s theory would not fit particularly well. I assumed that being concrete rather than abstract did not remove meaning in women’s lives, but that it might make it more difficult to articulate. Likewise I believed that the complexity of a scheme of meaning in life did not make it better. I believed that Fowler’s theory was valuable because it recognized the importance of religious beliefs, and I believed that at least some of the women in the study would have some type of religious beliefs. I thought that it was likely that all theories would fit all women’s stories, but some would fit better than others. From my previous research on values (Stockdale Winder, 1991), I felt that values were an important component of meaning in life, but their role was unclear. Finally, I believed that religion was an acceptable avenue through which to find meaning in life, and that conforming to religious beliefs and allowing oneself to be changed by those beliefs were appropriate avenues for growth. I felt that religion was not merely a delusional belief system which shelters one from existential realities, although it may be for some people.

4.4.2 Personal Beliefs about Meaning in Life

In articulating my own personal assumptions about meaning in life, I chose to structure it in terms of the interview questions. When I considered what gave me meaning in my life, my first response was my children who are undeniably the most important part of my life. My relationship with my husband is also very important. My work, in particular this research project, is fascinating and compelling. This portion of my training I regard as almost narcissistic because I find it so interesting. As I begin clinical work as a psychologist, I believe that working in a healing profession will be important and satisfying. Prayer is also important, and when I feel some despair about life or the world, I often pray and feel comforted. I enjoy listening to music and it lifts my spirits. When I play the piano or sing, the music seems to resonate somewhere within my soul, and I experience a deep sense of peace. Walks, biking, nature, the wind, all create that same sense of deep peace, and I’m able to slip into a more contemplative mood. My extended family and my friends are also important to me. I have a few close friends with whom I can be myself and be honest and who make me laugh. I enjoy aesthetically pleasing surroundings and clothes, and I am
fascinated by the interplay of colours. I like to be involved in committees and to know what is going on and to feel that in some way I am effecting change or maintaining a favourable status quo.

One of my beliefs about the world is that it is not a safe place. There are no guarantees of a safe voyage or a pain-free one, and to live without anxiety and with some degree of happiness despite those facts becomes a challenge.

I also mostly believe that God is present in the world, although she/he is an unseen presence which pervades all of our existence, such that it is impossible to separate out God from the fabric of the world. The way that God primarily acts is through people. For myself, this involves being willing to be less materialistic and more willing to share wealth with others in our society and with the rest of the world.

At one time in my life, my religious beliefs were central to my meaning in life. Somewhere buried in those beliefs was the assumption that I had somehow deserved my position in life. After working in a psychiatric hospital for one summer, I no longer believed that I was protected. This belief was further dismantled by the deaths of my sisters, one occurring before that summer, and one after it.

Before the deaths of my sisters, I also believed that God was in control of all events in the world, caused them to happen, and would work good from them. After they died, I began to believe that God did not cause those events to happen; they occurred because we live in a "fallen world." I now believe that events are a paradoxical mix of God being in control, and myself having free choice. My beliefs no longer imbue every aspect of my life with a sense of purpose. Christ’s teaching, however, motivates me to strive to be more caring for others and to be less materialistic. Through university I have also become more open-minded, more philosophical, and more tolerant of many different lifestyles and expressions of faith.

Until I had children, my meanings were equally divided between developing and maintaining intimate relationships and my work. When I had children, my life focused almost entirely around them and their welfare, then my spouse, and then my work, unless the demands of work became imperative.
In summary, my meaning in life is focused in relationships and work, with spirituality and creativity as additional dimensions. My own experience of meaning in life has been one of change, primarily within my spirituality, in a manner that I would classify as existential. The impact of my meaning in life on my research likely results in a belief in and a search for change in most participants’ lives, a sympathy toward and understanding of spirituality as a focus of meaning in life, and a strong belief in the importance of connectedness and relationships.

4.5 Participants

4.5.1 Recruitment Process

The initial two pilot interviews, which were included in the study, were with an acquaintance and a distant relative. The remaining seven participants were not known to myself prior to the study and were recruited by networking through friends, recruitment within seniors’ classes, and posters.

All participants received a pamphlet describing the study (see Appendix A for a copy of the pamphlet). It outlined the purpose of the study, the potential benefits of the study, and what participation in the study would require. After the women had an opportunity to review the pamphlet, a follow-up phone call was made to determine if they wished to participate and to answer any additional questions.

This method of recruitment may have been subject to a number of factors influencing self-selecting to participate in the study. One obvious factor was women’s interest in the topic of meaning in life. If a woman was not interested in meaning in life, she would have been less likely to participate. Feelings of adequacy may also have entered into a decision to participate. One woman in one senior’s class stated that she was interested in the study, but could not participate in the study because she did not feel she had meaning in her life. Other women may have silently exempted themselves from the study if they did not feel they had meaning in their lives, or if they did not believe that life had meaning or purpose. Because women were personally recruited, women who had a desire to help others may have been more likely to respond than women who did not.
4.5.2 Description of Participants

Because I was interested in changes in meaning in life, and particularly changes in meaning that might occur in the later stages of life, I decided to interview older women who would be able to reflect across their lifespans. I chose women rather than men because I believed that I could empathize more closely with their experiences, and could reflect their experiences more accurately. I also felt that women’s life experiences may not have been as well-reflected in the theories, and I wished to add their voices to our understanding of meaning in life. My original goal was to interview participants who were between the ages of 65 to 80 to have some similar cohort experiences. When participants volunteered who were outside of this age range, I decided to interview them, and to ascertain after the interview if their experiences seemed similar enough to be included. In each case, I decided that their stories could be included and still preserve enough homogeneity in the group to allow for analysis and comparison.

One of the participants asked not to be included in the study after she received feedback, because of concerns about anonymity (see Section 4.8 for more details). The ages of the remaining eight women in the study were: 60, 62, 67, 71, 76, 76, 82, and 84. Their occupations were dietary aide, homemaker/volunteer, laboratory technician, educator/politician, clerical/nurse’s aide, teacher/homemaker, telephone operator, and farmer/homemaker. Their marital status was 3 married, 4 widowed, and 1 single, and all the women except one had children. Six of the women were affiliated with a religion, and considered themselves to be actively practising it. Of the women currently practising a religion, one was Muslim, and the rest were Christian. The remaining two women had some spiritual beliefs. All of the participants were currently residing in Saskatchewan, seven were originally from a Western Canadian province, and one was from Africa.

4.6 The Interview

4.6.1 Interview Questions

The interview questions were modified slightly during the pilot interviews. Originally the opening questions were very broad, in an attempt to ask as generally as possible about
meaning in life, while imposing as few preconceptions on the construction of meaning in life as possible. I wanted to see what kind of structure would emerge from the interview. I then asked questions that were more specific to each of the reviewed theories. The initial set of twelve questions is in Appendix B.

In the initial interview I found that this task was too difficult for the participant, and that it created some anxiety in trying to determine what information I was requesting. In the next interview I modified some questions, deleted others, and added specific questions regarding important life experiences and advice she would give a young person. The task was still difficult, however, and both participants found it particularly difficult to answer these questions without referring to their life context, and telling me about their life story. I then re-examined Fowler's and Erikson's interview schedules, and modified the questions once more. This revised series of interview questions seemed to work well for the remaining participants (see Table 4.6/1).

The first nine questions were designed to help people talk as broadly as possible about their meaning in life and changes in it. The remaining three questions were added at the end to address hypotheses about the aging process that are suggested by the theories of Erikson, life review, and existentialism. Although I was concerned the questions would significantly shape the construction of the participants meaning in life, I found that the participants tended to answer more fully or completely the questions that they found relevant, and to answer with little detail or not at all the questions which they deemed to be less relevant.
**Table 4.6/1 Revised Interview Questions**

1. As you think back over your life, what experiences stand out as being important to you? What makes them important?

2. What gives you meaning or purpose in your life?

3. Has your sense of meaning or purpose changed over your life? If so, in what way?

4. Have you experienced losses, crises or suffering that have changed or “colored” your life in special ways? (Fowler, 1981)

5. Have you had moments of joy or peak experiences that have shaped or changed your life? (For example: in nature, in sexual experience or in the presence of inspiring beauty or communication?) (Fowler, 1981)

6. What experiences have affirmed your sense of meaning in life? What experiences have shaken or disturbed your sense of meaning? (Fowler, 1981)

7. Can you describe the beliefs and values or attitudes that are most important in guiding your own life? (Fowler, 1981)

8. When life seems most discouraging and hopeless, what holds you up or renews your hope? Example? (Fowler, 1981)

9. If you could give a young person some advice about life, what would you tell them? Would you always have answered this question the same way?

10. Do you see any changes in the way you view life that you would say were due to getting older?

11. Do you think back on your life more as your get older than when you were younger? What comes to mind?

12. Do you think about death more since you have gotten older? Does that influence how you view your life?

**4.6.2 Description of the Interviews**

The interviews ranged from 1 hour to 2.5 hours in length. All of the interviews took place in the participant’s place of residence. All the participants seemed relaxed, comfortable, and eager to share their experiences. The questions were written out, so
participants were able to reread the questions as needed to help focus their thoughts. I
attempted to remain relatively neutral while the participants were expressing their views,
neither agreeing nor disagreeing with expressed life attitudes or values. I used both neutral
(e.g., Tell me more about that) and more directive (e.g., Did you feel that was a change in
your experience of meaning in life?) prompts. I tried not to use leading prompts (e.g., It
sounds like your meaning shifted dramatically after you were married). At the end of the
interview I asked participants for comments, suggestions, and questions, and thanked them
for so generously sharing their life experiences with me. Both the questions and the
interview process were influenced by McCracken’s (1988) suggestions regarding the long
interview.

The interviews were tape recorded, and then transcribed either by myself or by a typist.
On one occasion, the tape recorder failed to record approximately one-third of the interview.
The participant (Sally) graciously offered to write out her answers to the questions contained
in that portion of the interview. Although this changed the form from oral to written in that
section of the narrative, the style remained quite similar. Likewise, the thematic content
dovetailed with my memory of the interview. On this basis I decided to include the written
answers as part of the narrative.

4.7 The Analysis

4.7.1 Thematic/Structural Analysis

A thematic analysis was the first type of analysis completed in this study. The process
of analysis borrowed heavily from the phenomenological method (Colaizzi, 1978; Hornstein;
1991; Polkinghorne, 1989). In Colaizzi’s version, which this analysis most closely followed,
a researcher “extracts significant statements” from the text. Next the researcher formulates
the meaning for each statement, and then aggregates the meanings into clusters of themes
across the participants. In this analysis, significant statements were extracted from the text.
When I began the thematic analysis, I highlighted any themes that seemed relevant to
meaning in life. I underlined quotations, and gathered quotations pertaining to the same
theme together into one location. I did this process for each transcript separately. However,
the meanings of each statement were not formulated into my words. I chose, rather, to leave them in the words of the participants (in a manner that may be more akin to grounded theory than to phenomenological method) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I believed that the longer I was able to work with the words of the participants, before moving to a higher level of abstraction, the more likely I would be to remain grounded in their experience of meaning in life. The significant statements were then clustered in themes for each participant. I chose not to aggregate themes across participants at this point, but searched for themes across participants in the comparative analysis.

As I was working on the thematic clustering, I noted that the form of some statements was quite different (e.g., "My children are important to me." versus "Life is a journey."). After three interviews had been analyzed thematically, the nature of the different forms of statements became clearer, and the remaining transcripts were analyzed using this structure as an organizing template. It consisted of life context, personal moral values, life attitudes, objects of meaning, affective colouring, and change (see Section 5.1 for details on this structure). I felt that the form with which a participant discussed meaning in life might provide some important information regarding how that participant structured meaning in life, and ultimately suggest how meaning in life could be structured. When the thematic/structural analysis was completed, the transcripts were reviewed to ensure consistency in the structural analysis. The thematic/structural analysis, arranged according to the structure of meaning in life, is presented for each participant in Appendices C to J. It should be noted that although the category of life context emerged in the thematic/structural analysis, it is not included in the Appendices because much of the content duplicates the material presented in the smoothed first-person narratives (presented in Section 5.5).

One of the ongoing difficulties in categorizing themes of meaning in life was the issue of faith. For some women faith was an object of meaning. It was thought about relatively little, and consisted primarily of going to church, and being involved in other church activities. For other women, faith was a life attitude, which influenced their view of the world, and their view of themselves. For other women, faith was an encompassing category which included the valuing of relationships within the church, personal moral values to guide
their lives, and a spiritual transcendence. It seemed that there was a choice between breaking faith into these different components, and placing aspects of it in each category, or keeping it as a whole, and placing it within the category which seemed most appropriate. I chose the latter option. Thus, for some women faith is deemed an object of meaning, for others it is categorized as a life attitude.

4.7.2 First-Person Narrative Accounts of Meaning in Life

4.7.2.1 Interpretive Construction of the First-Person Accounts

As a result of the thematic/structural analysis, I had what appeared to be the components of meaning in life for each participant. I was dissatisfied, however, with the results. They seemed to be dry, decontextualized, and not reflective of an experience as important as meaning in life. As I struggled for a manner in which to present the results that would be honouring to the participants and interesting to the reader, I used various voices, and engaged in various types of analysis. Each time I engaged with the narratives, my understanding of meaning in life increased, and affected how I considered the construct of meaning in life. This process is described below.

When I began my struggle to synthesize the results, I started with a summary of the thematic/structural analysis for each participant. The results were remote, “objectified,” and distant from the life experience of the participants. The synthesis was readily comparable to the abstractions of the theories, but it was neither honouring to the participants, nor enlightening to the reader. Much of this material can be found in the Appendices C to J.

In my next attempt at synthesis and presentation of results, I began to incorporate more of the life experiences of the participants. I interpreted their life experiences, however, and summarized them in a neatly encapsulated form with quotations from participants interspersed. The presentation relied almost completely on the thematic/structural analysis already completed. My own voice was clearly predominant in this presentation as well. Again this synthesis was readily comparable to the theories, but it still lacked the lived experience of the participants. I was frustrated with my inability to give voice to the women’s stories, and rejected this presentation of the results.
I then reread a paper by Westcott (1992) in which he described his approach to maintaining the contextualization of human freedom, but still strove toward a theory of human freedom. He chose to present his work as smoothed first-person narratives, and I resonated with this approach which allowed the intensely individual experience of freedom to be expressed, while still allowing movement toward abstraction. Further emboldened by Fine's (1994) argument to give women their own voices, I embarked on yet another analysis of the women's narratives, which I have called 'interpretive construction.'

As part of the process of interpretive construction, I went back to the interviews to search for any quotations that were salient to meaning in life. Salient quotations were extracted which seemed particularly relevant for highlighting the components which were generated in the thematic/structural analysis (life context, personal moral values, objects of meaning, life attitudes, affective coloring, and change processes—see Section 5.1 for an explanation of these terms). I also tried to look at the narratives anew, and choose again the quotations that were important. Particular attention was paid to stories within the transcripts which seemed to bring to life the meaning which the participant described. These quotations were then smoothed into a first-person narrative, which retained as much as possible of the participant's oral narrative flavour. The quotations were chronologically arranged because I felt that it would be more understandable and accessible to the reader in chronological order. Changes in wording were made for clarity and anonymity, but were done sparingly. These first-person narratives are found in Section 5.5.

The process of interpretive construction added a richness to my understanding of the women's experiences of meaning in life. By examining the whole of narratives, and attempting to arrive at a synthesis of their expressions of meaning in life, I saw the narratives from a different perspective than had previously been possible at the analytic level. There was an element of immersion and crystallization, whereby the meaning of the experiences of the women became clearer and more personally meaningful (Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

After constructing the stories, the themes of each woman's meaning in life were highlighted. These themes emerged from the thematic/structural analysis, but also emerged from the interpretive construction. The interpretive construction sometimes revealed themes
or contradictions or dilemmas that were not apparent in the thematic/structural analysis. In particular I paid attention to temporal connections of events in the women’s accounts, and strove to understand why those connections had been made for that woman. I was also sensitive to apparent contradictions within the narratives, and struggled to understand those apparent contradictions. The understanding was rarely complete, but it did foster a close examination of both my assumptions regarding meaning in life, and the participant’s assumptions. These themes can be found in Section 5.5, in the comments following each woman’s story.

In addition to looking for themes of meaning in life, I also looked at the process of change in the participant’s meaning in life. As part of the interpretive construction, I examined the overall gestalt of the narrative and tried to determine if the woman felt there had been changes, and the nature of those changes, in her experience of meaning in life. I then analyzed where the change or stability occurred in a participant’s meaning in life, in each of the structures of meaning in life which emerged in the thematic/structural analysis. The interpretation and analysis of the change processes can be found in Section 5.5, in the comments following each woman’s story.

The thematic/structural analysis and the interpretive construction was a constant process of determination between when the voices of the women needed to stand with little interpretation, and when interpretation and analysis were needed and necessary. The line between over-interpretation and too little interpretation seems to be difficult to find, and one which likely varies for each research project. Fine (1994) summarized this dilemma neatly: “Yet the risk for qualitative researchers has been and continues to be imperial translation....At the same time another risk surfaces. This risk lies in the romanticizing of narratives and the concomitant retreat from analysis” (Fine, 1994, p.80). The balance achieved in this project has been largely satisfactory to myself, but will likely be perceived and judged quite differently by researchers from even a slightly different paradigm.
4.7.2.2 The Question of Voice

Olesen (1994) pointed out that within feminist research it has become very important to consider "the question of voice and, by implication, the account" (p.167). She noted that there is no method which allows for a clear voice of participants because the voice of the researcher is always present. My voice is clearly present in this research project. Nonetheless, I have also attempted to present the women’s voices. I tried to choose open questions, and to allow for a presentation of their own stories. I strove to understand my own interpretive biases, and by acknowledging my biases to be open to new information in the stories. Finally, I tried to reflect about my choice of quotations which became part of the narrative accounts, to question my choices, and to return to their voices when I was unsure. It is my belief that the women’s voices are present as well as my own voice.

4.7.3 Comparative Analysis

After the themes of meaning in life had been identified, and their relative change or stability had been analyzed, a comparative analysis was adopted, which included aspects of the hermeneutic circle. Each participant’s narrative was compared to each of the theories to ascertain their similarities and differences. During the comparative analysis, I utilized the markers of change that I had identified for each of the theories, and looked at each woman’s story to see if those markers were present. Naturally there was a good measure of referring back to the original texts of the theories, and the complete transcripts of the participants when there were aspects that were unclear. Through this process I came to an increased understanding of the theories and of the individual’s stories. Stake (1994) described this process when referring to the purposes of case studies. He noted that one might choose to do intrinsic case studies, for the purpose of understanding one particular case. One might also choose to do instrumental case studies, which are chosen to illuminate a particular theory. Generally, however, there is a “zone of combined purpose” separating the two, and the researcher is able to learn intrinsically interesting things about the cases, and to learn more about a theory. In this research project I found that the women’s stories were intrinsically interesting, and they were also sometimes instrumental in illuminating particular theories.
The results of the comparative analysis is found both in the comments following the women’s stories in Section 5.5 and in Sections 6.3.3 to 6.4. It should be noted that although all the markers of each theory were compared to each woman’s story, only those theories which seemed particularly relevant to a woman’s story were discussed in any detail.

When this analysis of the narratives was completed, the change and stability across the narratives were examined, and some more abstract theorizing about the mechanisms of change in meaning in life for these women was done. The results of this analysis are found in Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2.

4.8 The Feedback

Most participants received feedback 18 months to 21 months following their interviews. Because of health concerns, one woman was given feedback 3 months after the interview. This participant received a copy of a third-person narrative account of her story, and the corresponding content analysis. The other participants received a copy of their first-person narratives and comments, and a copy of the content analysis of their interviews as found in Appendices C to J. Each participant had an opportunity to review these documents, and we then discussed them a few days later, either in person or by telephone. I took notes during these feedback sessions, and made the suggested changes to the narratives and appendices. Generally the participants felt that the accounts were an accurate reflection of their life experiences and of their meaning in life. Most of the corrections involved inaccuracies in life history details, or requests for wording changes.

The exception to this was one participant who decided to withdraw from the study after the first set of revisions was unsatisfactory to her. She was originally from Europe and she felt that I had imposed my culture onto her cultural experience. She also had serious concerns about her anonymity being threatened and felt that the oral narrative form was inappropriate. She felt that the interview had captured her views of her life on a particular day within the context of a particular interview. She seemed to be a dramatic and expressive woman who experienced each moment of life quite intensely and whose perspective shifted somewhat from day-to-day. It is not suprising that a brief static account of her life was
dissatisfying. Although her story is not included, her views and experiences of meaning in life did influence my analysis and in particular sensitized me to the experiential elements of meaning in life.

A second participant, Zara, also felt that there were significant cultural constraints in my understanding of her narrative. She graciously took time to review and rewrite some parts of her account. I incorporated as many of her comments as possible, given space constraints, and my own cultural barriers, which she rightly identified. We emerged with a narrative which was mostly satisfactory to her, but she still felt that I did not truly understand her cultural experience, and that this lack of understanding should be noted when reading her narrative.

Given the satisfaction of most participants with the accounts, and given the time lapse between the interviews and the feedback, I have some degree of confidence that the first-person narratives capture the salient issues of meaning in life for the participants, and that there is some stability in these constructions.

During the feedback interviews, however, I was struck by the fragility of the meanings which we create in our lives. Two women had lost their husbands during the time intervening between the first interview and the feedback interview. They reflected upon the sadness which they experienced in reading their narratives from a different point in their lives, in which their husbands had held a prominent position in their meaning in life. Another woman, who had formed a close bond with a group of women, reported that her coffee group had disbanded because there were only two of them left. All of these women were continuing with their lives, and continuing to create meaning, but there were significantly different strands with which they were now weaving their meaning.

4.9 Criteria for Judging Research from a Constructivist Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) compared various paradigms of qualitative research. In their discussion of the constructivist paradigm, they noted some criteria from which to judge this research:
Two sets of criteria have been proposed: the *trustworthiness* criteria of credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability), and confirmability (paralleling objectivity); and the *authenticity* criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity (enlarges personal constructions), educative authenticity (leads to improved understanding of constructions of others), catalytic authenticity (stimulates to action), and tactical authenticity (empowers action). (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.114)

They also noted that the first set of criteria was created early in the development of the constructivist paradigm, and that it was somewhat suspect because it mirrored positivist criteria. This research project is limited in the extent to which it meets the trustworthiness criteria. I agree with Lincoln and Guba that these criteria are largely positivistic in nature, and thus relatively less appropriate for judging constructivist research.

The second set of criteria were developed in the context of social research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I have taken some liberties in interpreting these criteria for the purposes of judging this research project. I believe that the research project meets the authenticity requirements much more readily, largely because the authenticity requirements more closely match a constructivist paradigm.

The first authenticity requirement is fairness. Do the research findings fairly represent the experiences of the participants? As was mentioned previously, most of the participants were very satisfied with the narrative accounts, and felt that they accurately reflected the substance of our interview, and their views on their meanings in life. With regard to the thematic/structural analysis, my supervisor reviewed two transcripts (Hannah’s and Ginny’s) and then reviewed the emergent thematic/structural analysis. He confirmed that the thematic/structural analysis captured both the themes and the structures of meaning in life present in the transcripts. Because these transcripts were quite different in their presentation of meaning in life, we felt fairly confident that if the thematic/structural analysis was satisfactory in these transcripts, it would be with the remaining transcripts as well. With regard to the construction of the first-person narratives, my supervisor reviewed the
transcripts and the narratives of Eleanor and Clara. He reviewed them using the following criteria: that the smoothed narratives included the essential aspects of meaning in life; that the narratives reflected the important experiences and stories of the participants; and that the narratives reflected the voice of the participant. Again he confirmed that the narratives were reflective of the transcripts, and because they were quite different in their forms and their voices, we felt fairly confident that the remaining transcripts would be satisfactory as well.

The second criterion of ontological authenticity (enlarging personal constructions) was certainly met from my perspective. I felt that my personal construction of meaning in life was constantly challenged, expanded, and explored during this research project. It was this sense of growing and learning from the women’s experiences that kept me interested in the project through many months of analysis and writing. The women also seemed to find their personal constructions had been enlarged. Many of the women reported that both the interview process and the feedback process had allowed them to learn new things or rediscover old things about themselves.

The third criterion of educative authenticity must largely be based on the reader’s perception of learning. The process of learning from case studies is an interesting dilemma when moving from a positivist to a constructivist paradigm. Within positivism we are taught to suspect all knowledge that is not clothed in objectivity and reliability and which does not meet the standards required for generalizability. How then can case studies, from which most of us have the experience of learning, have educative authenticity? Put more simply, how do we learn from a particular case? Stake (1994) summarized the learning process in this fashion:

From case reports we learn both propositional and experiential knowledge.

Certain descriptions and assertions are assimilated by readers into memory.

When the researcher’s narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings. Naturalistic, ethnographic case materials, to some extent, parallel actual experience, feeding into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding. Deborah Trumbull and I have called these processes naturalistic generalization. The reader comes to
know some things told, as if he or she had experienced them. Enduring meanings come from encounter, and are modified and reinforced by repeated encounter.

(p.240)

It is my hope that this process of learning will occur for the reader.

Naturalistic generalization is quite different from post-positivist generalizability. This research can make no claims to post-positivist generalizability. It does suggest, however, some interesting avenues for exploration. If one were to follow a grounded theory approach, some future steps may be to theoretically sample across different groups of people, for the purpose of gradually-widening the circle of people to whom this research might be applicable (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). From this perspective, this research would be a first step in the process of developing a model of meaning in life that captured some important elements of experience and of change.

Catalytic and tactical authenticity are generally more applicable for research which is strongly feminist than for this research project. The goal of feminist research is to seek to understand the experiences of the minorities and the oppressed, and to encourage and empower action to address identified imbalances. As such it is appropriate that catalytic and tactical authenticity would be criteria by which feminist research would be judged. This research project, however, while it sought to understand the experiences of women, who had been somewhat marginalized in previous explorations of meaning in life, was less concerned with societal changes than other traditions of feminist research. It is my hope that there will be some changes in our psychological constructions of meaning in life, changes that will be more inclusive of women’s experiences, and I make suggestions regarding those possible changes in the discussion.
5. Results

5.1 Emergent Coding Categories of Meaning in Life and Resulting Structure for Meaning in Life

In this section I describe coding categories for meaning in life which were used in the thematic/structural analysis. They include life context, personal moral values, objects of meaning, life attitudes, affective colouring, and change (see Table 5.1/1). The coding categories were informed by the theories of meaning in life, by the interviews with nine women, by the initial analysis of three interviews, and by discussions with colleagues. They emerged relatively early in the project, and stayed stable throughout the project, although two additional components of meaning in life emerged in the interpretive construction, and were refined through comparative analysis (see Section 5.2 Paths to Meaning and Section 5.3 Modality of Meaning). The coding categories of the thematic/structural analysis reflect the forms in which these participants expressed their meaning in life, and they capture many of the theoretical elements of meaning in life. They also provide a basis from which to develop a framework of meaning in life, and to discuss change. The information coded in each category for each participant can be found in Appendices C through J, with the exception of life context, which was integrated into the first-person narratives included in this section.

The life context was a description of both important life experiences and an individual’s perception of those events. Life context can serve as the backdrop to understanding a person’s meaning in life, or as an active participant in shaping meaning, or as

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<td>• Affective Colouring</td>
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a reflection of meaning in life. Life context is a background in that to understand fully the significance of an object of meaning, one must also understand each life (see Westcott, 1992). An object which is meaningful to two individuals will not have the same dimensions of meaningfulness in both individuals’ lives. These dimensions are supplied by the life context. Life context is also a participant in shaping meaning. Many of the psychological theories point to life events as being key instigators of changes in meaning in life. The Greek tragedies might call this role of life context fate. Life context is also a reflection of one’s meaning in life, because meaning in life shapes one’s perception of life and alters the course of one’s subsequent life experiences. In this sense, the life context reflects what is meaningful to an individual.

Life context was originally coded in the thematic/structural analysis, but when I decided to present the results as first-person narratives, there was redundancy between the information coded in the category of life context, and the first-person narratives. I decided to remove the coding category of life context from the information presented in Appendices C through J. In the consideration of the structure of meaning in life, however, life context remains important.

If I had been able to consider it, an equally important aspect of meaning in life is the social or cultural context of a person’s life (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985). Social and cultural contexts play a very important role in shaping what individuals in a society believe to be valuable. I chose, however, not to add this level of complexity to the portrayal of meaning in life for these women.

Personal moral values were a second component of meaning in life. Baumeister (1991) argued that in order to have a sense of meaning in life we must believe that we are moral or good human beings and that we must have a sense that we or our actions are of worth. I am not convinced that this is a necessary condition, but it seems fairly clear that personal moral values do provide purpose or motivation in life and as such provide meaning. By personal moral values, I am referring to values which have been assimilated from the culture or which may be a reaction against cultural standards. They are personal in that they have become part of an individual’s lifestyle and life attitudes. They are moral in that they allow a person to
make judgments about whether an action is right or wrong. They are values in that they are
notions of the desirable. They are ideas or cognitions rather than objects, but they retain an
affective component (see Stockdale Winder, 1991). Some examples of personal moral values
are honesty, working hard, and caring for other people.

Objects or experiences of value which provide meaning (objects of meaning) were a
third component of meaning in life. These differ from personal moral values in two ways:

1. Objects of meaning had not been analyzed by the participant for why they were
important to her. They were valued for the immediacy of their experience. The
valuation tended to be more affective than cognitive.

2. These meaning objects were not explicitly analyzed for their moral worth. They were
valued not because they were good in a moral sense, but because they were enjoyable.
It could be argued that anything which is enjoyed in a culture is enjoyed because the
person has assimilated cultural values which influence the person to construe a certain
experience as enjoyable. Theoretically I believe that this perspective is likely correct.
In reading the transcripts, however, explicit personal moral values had a distinctly
different quality than an object or experience of value which provides meaning to a
woman. Compare “sense of justice” to “my children.”

Some women in the study had more meaning objects and fewer personal moral values
because they had not reflected upon or analyzed their experiences. They had simply lived
life. Therefore, to a certain extent, personal moral values and meaning objects could be seen
as being on a continuum of abstract/cognitive to concrete/affective. The placement of a
participant on this continuum, however, would not reflect a judgment of “better” or “worse”
meaning in life.

A simple example of an object of meaning is crocheting. For two of the women in this
study, crocheting was an enjoyable pastime, which provided some meaning in day-to-day
experience. When asked why crocheting was important to them, they were unable to reflect
any further on the experience of crocheting. It simply was important. It is possible to
abstract in many different directions on why crocheting was important. It could be related to
many personal moral values: the creative process, an opportunity to meditate, the making of
gifts to strengthen relationship ties. Abstracting too far, however, loses the immediacy of the
experience for that participant and it may in fact be an inaccurate and inappropriate
abstraction for the participant.

Life attitudes (ultimate reality or world view) were a fourth component of meaning in
life. Life attitudes are beliefs about the world or others or oneself that are regarded by the
individual as existential fact and/or are a higher-order summation of simpler personal moral
values. An example of the first type of life attitude was, "God is in control." An example of
the second type of life attitude was, "My purpose is to be a good Christian, a good mother,
and a good neighbour." Life attitudes may also include ways of being in the world, that
again are not consciously regarded as preferable for others as well, but simply are the
approach that an individual takes to life. An example of a way of being was thankfulness.

Affective colouring was a fifth component of meaning in life. Running through
personal moral values, meaning objects, and life attitudes is the affective colouring which an
individual brings to his/her meaning in life. For some individuals who experience affect
intensely and with some variability, life can seem extraordinarily filled with meaning at one
point and completely devoid of meaning at another point. Another individual may
experience few highs and lows, and find a less affect-laden meaning in life, which changes
little across circumstances or events. Changes in the cognitive aspects of meaning in life may
also produce changes in affect. When an individual loses an object of meaning in her/his life,
sadness and grief are likely consequences. I would not, however, equate happiness or mental
well-being with having meaning in life (Reker & Wong, 1988). I believe that one can have a
sense of meaning in life, and yet be unhappy, as is suggested by existentialists. I am
simplifying the complex backdrop that affect weaves throughout meaning in life. In this
study I simply wanted to attempt to recognize affect as a component of meaning in life and to
begin to consider its role in meaning-making.

Change was the sixth component of meaning in life. Change may occur in any aspect
of meaning in life. One's personal moral values may change, a former object of meaning
may cease to have meaning, and a life attitude that was once regarded as an existential fact
may come to be seen as an illusion. Because change was a key component of this research project, it was included as part of the organizing template for the content analysis.

As was mentioned in Section 4.7.1, these components of meaning in life were used as a framework for a thematic/structural analysis of the transcripts for each participant. This thematic/structural analysis will not be included in the results section due to its length, but it is included in Appendices C through J to refer to as needed. As was previously mentioned, the section on life context has not been included in the appendices because it is documented in the smoothed first-person narratives.

5.2 Paths to Meaning

During the interpretive construction (as described in Section 4.7.2), larger themes began to emerge in the women’s stories. These themes included connectedness, altruism, object-focused (including being activity-oriented and creative), individualism, and transcendence. I found that these larger themes, which I call “Paths to Meaning,” frequently tied together the content of the various components of meaning in life. For example, one woman who valued connectedness emphasized “getting along with others” in her personal moral values, “relationships within her church” in her objects of meaning, and stated her purpose was to be “a good Christian, a good mother, and a good neighbour” within the life attitudes. As I pondered on this construct, and struggled with the best representation for the women in this study, I became aware that there were several such frameworks in the literature, although they had different names. I will discuss each of these frameworks separately, propose a synthesis of them, and then compare it to the paths to meaning which emerged in this study. It may be helpful to refer to Table 5.2/1, which lists the categories of meaning for each research model.
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McAdams’ imagoes provide a way of considering paths to meaning that is in keeping with the narrative approach. McAdams stated that we create our identities within the context of a life story. As part of that identity formation, we create imagoes which are representations of different aspects of the self. Imagoes are “one-dimensional, ‘stock’ characters in the life story, and each integrates a host of different characteristics, roles, and experiences in the person’s life,” (McAdams, 1994, p.756). McAdams has developed a “taxonomy of general imago forms” divided according to the themes of agency, communion, agency and communion, and a lack of agency and communion.

One of the appealing aspects of McAdams’ work is that, although we may have a dominant imago, it is recognized that each person may have several imagoes that may be called upon to respond in different situations. The same appeared to be true for the paths to meaning. Although some of the women in this study did have a single path to meaning, most had one or two dominant paths to meaning, and some were able to combine aspects of several
paths to meaning. McAdams’ concept of imagoes allows for an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of the self, and thus for the multi-dimensional nature of meaning.

As a modern adult who must find meaning at home, at work, and in all the other domains in my life, I cannot and do not want to be everything to everybody at every place and time. But I can be some important things in some important ways for some important people, at particular times and in particular places. Furthermore, I can be these things in a way that is unique to me, and in a way that is self-consistent, coherent, meaningful, purposeful, and gratifying. (p.757)

I find that many of McAdams’ particular imagoes have resonance with the women’s narratives. For example, Sally could be seen as The Survivor (low agency and communion) during her childhood and her marriage. Agency was not allowed to emerge, and there seemed to be little energy remaining for communion. Following the death of her husband, her path to meaning seemed to emerge as The Sage (high agency and communion). Both of these imagoes, and others, had been present throughout her life, but the predominance of one imago over another illuminates the shift in her path to meaning. This same scheme could be used to understand other women’s paths to meaning, the changes in their paths, and how different paths may be combined.

Battista developed six life orientation categories: interpersonal, service, understanding, obtaining, expressive, and ethical (Battista & Almond, 1973). These categories were considered to summarize the life role or life goals that an individual held. The categories of interpersonal and service are self-explanatory. Understanding refers to developing theories and abstract thinking. Obtaining refers to emphasizing material possessions. Expressive “emphasizes self-expression through feelings, art, athletics” (p.422). Ethical orientation refers to living according to one’s belief system (political, religious, or social). These appear to have been developed from a review of the literature, and from personal experience. Battista noted that an individual could hold more than one life orientation.

Allport, Vernon & Lindzey (1960) developed a questionnaire based on Spranger’s theory of six personality types: theoretical, economic (material or obtaining), aesthetic (creating a more beautiful world), social (altruism), political (power), religious (unity &
communion). These types are primarily value orientations, but they also reflect the content of one's paths to meaning.

De Vogler & Ebersole (1981) studied meaning in life by asking adult participants to write about their meaning. They then analyzed these responses, and noted several themes that seemed to consistently emerge: relationships, belief, health, growth, life work, service, and understanding. Combining these results with previous research done with undergraduates, they proposed eight categories of life meaning: belief, growth, health, life work, obtaining, pleasure, relationships, and service. These themes, like Allport, Vernon & Lindzey's values, describe the content of an individual's meaning in life. They are one of the few empirically derived samplings in the literature that is reflective of the primary meaning that individuals hold. They provide an interesting base for comparison with the more theoretically-derived paths to meaning.

De Vogler-Ebersole & Ebersole (1985) also investigated the number of meanings which people found they had in their lives. In a study of undergraduates, they found that the average number of meanings reported was 6.29. This finding suggests that some people do have a variety of meaning in their lives, and that their meaning may be difficult to categorize in a single path to meaning.

Royce and Powell (1983) proposed that the overall goal of each person's life is to find personal meaning. Personal meaning includes world views, images of self, and life styles. The personal meaning which is found to be satisfactory reflects individual differences in the many sub-systems of personality, including sensory, motor, cognitive, and affective systems. They believed that world view, images of self, and life styles were most directly influenced by "how" one perceived the world, or one's cognitive style, and "what" one believed and valued in the world, or one's value system. The value and style systems are combined in the philosophies of meaning in life and these are icarism, individualism, and altruism.

Icarism refers to the pursuit of mastery of an object or craft. They stated that this philosophy of life included the pursuits of many creative individuals for whom mastery of a particular form was the most important goal of life. An example of an icarist is a skater, for whom the mastery of a particular series of jumps might give great personal meaning.
Individualism refers to the development of self and a commitment to self-actualization. It also involves being willing to define oneself out of the context of societal goals and norms, and to find personal meaning in alternative roles. An example of an individualist would be a Saskatchewan resident who collects boots and mounts them on miles of fence posts. There is minimal societal affirmation of such a pursuit, but there is personal meaning in the endeavour.

Altruism refers to the devotion of one’s life to the good of others. There is an element of self-sacrifice, because when the needs of others and the self are in conflict, the needs of others are chosen as being primary. An example of an altruist is a woman who consistently puts the needs of others in her community or in her family ahead of her own needs, and finds personal meaning in this lifestyle.

By comparing across the constructs of these different models, some consistencies emerged in the themes of paths to meaning. These paths are presented in Table 5.2/2 and include interpersonal, service, obtaining, power, pleasure, creativity, understanding, and spirituality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.2/2 Higher-Order Thematic Clustering of Personal Meaning Content as Derived from the Study &amp; the Literature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• interpersonal</td>
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<td>• understanding</td>
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<td>• spirituality</td>
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I chose to build upon Royce and Powell’s model for the paths to meaning in this study because it seemed to capture some important elements of the paths to meaning, but could still
be adapted to incorporate the women’s experiences. The simplicity of the tripartite scheme was appealing, but I was somewhat dissatisfied with the division of icarism and individualism, which I perceived as being agentic, and no corresponding differentiation of communion, with altruism being the only communal path. In particular it seemed that many people valued relationships, without the necessarily being self-sacrificing (Stockdale Winder, 1991). When I was reviewing the overall life themes of all of the participants, I concluded that “connectedness” was an appropriate pathway to add to the scheme, because it denoted the importance of relationships without implying self-sacrifice or acting for the interests of others. For several women in the study, maintaining connectedness was a important theme, which was separate from altruism.

As the transcripts of the women were reviewed, it also became apparent that a spiritual way of being, apart from one which was manifest in altruism, was not included in the scheme. For one woman in the study, there was a distinctly spiritual, or almost mystical, quality to her narrative that was not readily captured by a focus on other or a focus on self. It was a focus which seemed to transcend both others and self, and thus I felt “transcendence” was an important addition to the philosophies of life.

For the women in this study, icarism, and the implied mastery of a form of creation, did not seem to capture their philosophy of life. One woman in particular was very creative, but there was no sense in her narrative of the drive to “master” her art. She explored it, enjoyed it, was challenged by it, and worked with it, rather than attempting to conquer it. The act of creation itself was a joy. Other women enjoyed activities, not to master the activities, but as a simple pleasure of life, and for the sense of accomplishment. I have thus relabelled this path as “object-focused” to signify the outer object direction of the path to meaning, without the implication of mastery.

Royce and Powell (1988) proposed that the philosophies of life may be found in different combinations for different people. One person may be a complete individualist, but another person may find meaning in combinations of the philosophies of life. The women in this study reflected this diversity of paths. Some women did seem to follow one path to meaning, others combined two or three paths. Sometimes one path was dominant for a
period of time, and then another path became dominant. Thus the paths to meaning (connectedness, altruism, individualism, object-focused, and transcendence) provided a useful way of approaching meaning in life, both in grappling with its complexity, and in understanding its change.

There is considerable overlap between the paths to meaning of these participants (connectedness, altruism, individualism, object-focused, and transcendence) and those found in the literature. Interpersonal and connectedness refer to the same construct of valuing relationships with other people. Service and altruism both reflect the importance of helping other people. Obtaining and power were not present as paths to meaning in these women’s narratives. For many of these women, connectedness was the primary path to meaning. Given the sometimes contradictory nature of an obtaining/power path, and the path of connectedness, it makes some sense that most women expressed few themes of obtaining or power. Pleasure was another theme which did not emerge in the narratives. For most of these women, pleasure was a by-product of the many activities that they engaged in, but was not a primary focus. Object-focused was a path to meaning in this study, which included both creativity and activity. Creativity was highlighted in the literature as being important. Activity reflected the valuing of meaning in objects external to the self such as participation in organizations, or labouring, or simply staying physically active. Activity was not highlighted in the theoretical literature. It was, however, suggested by the category of “life work” which emerged in DeVogler-Ebersole and Ebersole’s transcripts. This suggests that it may be useful to continue to study the construct of activity, its differences from other more abstract constructs, and its utility. Understanding is a path to meaning highly valued by many researchers and intellectuals. In this study it was placed within the path of individualism, along with other individualist enterprises, because it reflected an internal focus. Understanding itself was not a predominant path to meaning in many of these participants’ lives, with the notable exception of Sally and Zara. Spirituality can include many aspects of a path to meaning. It may reflect a focus on values, an emphasis on community in the church, or a focus on issues that transcend this world. Within this study
the spiritual path did emerge, although it was called transcendence, and referred specifically to participants who sought meaning through a transcendence of self or other.

In summary, most of the paths to meaning that have been noted in the literature also emerged in this study. Obtaining, power, and pleasure were found in the literature, but were not the central focus of the narratives of these women. Activity was a path to meaning that was found in the narratives of these women, that has been suggested, though not fully-developed, in the literature.

5.3 Modality of Meaning

Modality of meaning is a component of meaning in life which reflects the “how” rather than the “what” of meaning in life. Modality of meaning refers to a broad general concept of the preferred way of experiencing and interacting with the world. While I was studying the narratives, it struck me that some women were expressing the same content in their meaning in life, but their experiences of that meaning were markedly different. Some women appeared to be primarily “thinking” and interacted with the world in a relatively detached, cognitive style. Ideas and thought were highly valued. Other women appeared to be primarily “doing” and interacted with the world in terms of activities to be accomplished. They gained significant satisfaction from the physical and kinesthetic. Other women appeared to be primarily “feeling” and interacted with the world with strong emotional involvement. Maintaining connectedness with others and relationships were highly valued for these women. Concepts similar to a modality of meaning have been noted in the literature. Two of these concepts will be reviewed.

Frankl (1984) wrote about three “paths to meaning”: creative, experiential, attitudinal. These three “paths to meaning” have aspects which are very similar to modality of meaning. He stated that the creative path was self-explanatory, but elaborated on the experiential and the attitudinal. Individuals who focused on the experiences of their lives, such as love, to find meaning, were following an experiential path. Frankl noted that meaning could develop when one followed an experiential path in loving another person unreservedly. Finding meaning through the attitudinal paths was one of the central themes of his book. He stated
that one can choose to find meaning in any situation, and he cited examples from his experiences in a concentration camp.

Royce and Powell (1983) proposed that each individual had a preferred cognitive-affective style, which is quite similar to this study’s construct of mode of meaning. Although there is no direct one-to-one correspondence between the two constructs, there is enough similarity to warrant comparison. Their cognitive-affective styles are empirical, rational, and metaphoric.

*Empirical* styles involve a commitment to relating to the world through one’s senses and to testing one’s ideas about reality in terms of reliability and validity of observations. Affectively, there is a commitment to the arousal that comes via immediate experience. (Royce & Powell, 1983, p.135)

The empirical style seems most similar to the mode of meaning of “doing” in this study, with its emphasis on the experiential and being activity-oriented.

*Rational* styles involve a commitment to relating to the world through one’s rational/analytic skills and to testing one’s ideas about reality in terms of logical consistency. Affectively, there is a commitment to remaining aloof from the arousal effects of the immediate environment. (Royce & Powell, 1983, p.135)

The rational style seems most similar to the mode of meaning of “thinking” in this study. There is an emphasis on containing one’s emotions to allow for a rational and thoughtful examination of the world.

*Metaphoric* styles involve a commitment to symbolic-metaphoric experience and to testing one’s ideas or awareness about reality in terms of their universality (i.e., to constructing cognitive representations of experience that have the greatest degree of generality). (Royce & Powell, 1983, p.135)

Royce and Powell do not state what affective style might be most likely to be joined with the metaphoric style. It seems possible, however, that this type of holistic style of perception and cognition may be accompanied by considerable emphasis on the emotions as part of the
process of intuiting the whole. If this speculation were accurate, the metaphoric style would be very similar to the “feeling” mode of meaning described in this study.

Frankl, Royce, and Powell’s work provided some suggestion that there is merit in considering modes of meaning, such as “feeling,” “thinking,” and “doing.” The concept of modality of meaning assisted me in understanding why some psychological theories had limited explanatory power. Most of the theories emphasize the “thinking” modality, to the exclusion of “doing” and “feeling,” and change is considered most often with the “thinking” modality. Thus, some elements of change which were in the “feeling” or “doing” modalities were lost in our theories. This difficulty will be explored in relation to the theories in the discussion section. More research would be needed, however, to consider further their roles in meaning in life.

5.4 Framework of Meaning in Life

As a tool in understanding the various components of meaning in life that have been suggested, the diagram in Figure 5.4/1 may be helpful. The components of meaning in life, found on the bottom row, are represented by boxes with bi-directional arrows indicating that they influence the paths to meaning, and the paths to meaning influence each of the components of meaning. The paths to meaning are seen as having the most direct link to personal meaning because they are intended to incorporate many of the other components. Personal meaning is placed at the top of the diagram to indicate its centrality to this structure of meaning in life. Modality of meaning has been represented with arrows going to the components of meaning in life, the paths to meaning, and personal meaning because it is felt that this “personality” variable of meaning in life influences the direction of meaning in life at all levels. Although bi-directional arrows have not been drawn linking all the primary components of meaning in life, they should be understood to be interacting with each other, and to have mutual influence.
5.5 Life Stories and Commentary

5.5.1 Introduction

The first-person accounts of each participant's meaning in life are smoothed versions of an oral narrative. Except for changes made for clarity, brevity, or anonymity, they are the words of the participants. The stories are grouped by the relative change or stability in meaning in life, and by their paths to meaning, as shown in Table 5.5/1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Stability &amp; Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary:</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara:</td>
<td></td>
<td>life</td>
<td>Object-focused</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Individualist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eleanor:</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
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<td>Hannah:</td>
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<td>Zara:</td>
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<td>Altruism</td>
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<td>Sally:</td>
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<td>Norma:</td>
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<td>Ginny:</td>
<td>Object-focused</td>
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</table>
5.5.2 Stability, Change, and Connectedness

5.5.2.1 Mary’s Story

“Time wasted is not wasted, not when we are talking and good friends.”

I grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan. My father was a very friendly person, and he
was very easy to get along with. He was very, very good with the grandchildren, and of
course all of my children got to know him. He always had time for them. Both my parents
were good with the kids, mother was very good about remembering the kids.

I got married and we lived on a farm two miles down the road from my mother and
dad, so that transition wasn’t that hard because I saw them often. It wasn’t as if I was a
hundred miles away. We farmed for the first ten years and then he was working as a
carpenter and then he got a maintenance job, and he was there for 20 years.

The birth of our first baby was a difficult adjustment. It was quite a shock to the
system to realize that you had to look after a baby, and to realize that a little person needs
attention every second. Even when we were milking cows, we had to take him to the barn
with us!

Looking after my family and my husband was very important to me. I had four
children, and I think I looked after them well. None of them had serious illnesses, none of
them were ever in the hospital, except one had tonsils done, so I thought I was a fairly good
mother. They were certainly grown up in the church, they were there every Sunday till they
left home. They never had any trouble in school.

It is a big worry when they leave home and mine were all young when they left home,
they were all 18 and they were gone and that was it. All except the last one. We had good
communication, and we’d phone. When our oldest son left home to work in a nearby small
town, we’d have to go and get him every weekend because there was nothing for him to do
Saturdays and Sundays, when the banks were closed. That was a big rejoicing every
weekend, we’d have him home and not have to worry about him until next week. The girls
were in nurse’s training and they were living in residence, so I felt that they were more
protected, because you knew that they had to be in a certain time and you knew they were there, or else they’d sure let me know if the kids didn’t show up.

I still see them or I talk to them on a regular basis, all of them, usually it’s a Sunday and I can talk to all four of them on one day. One especially she phones me every Sunday morning, the other one might be hit or miss, she might phone me every second one or every two or something. I still have contact with them all.

Family is most important. When I see people that have never had any communication with family, I feel very, very sad. My neighbour only had herself and her husband and nephews and nieces and she has missed a lot. That is the purpose of anyone’s life I would think, you get married, naturally you hope to have a family and of course looking after them health-wise and nurture, naturally.

I worked as a dietary aide for 19 years. I was very interested in my job and it was very fruitful for me. I had real good relations, there were 42 on staff and I can’t say that I ever argued with anyone. I’ve had very congenial people to work with, and the dietitians that I have worked under have been excellent people, and they were friends, you know, true friends not really just the boss type. I used to have them over to my house and everything. I enjoyed my work very, very much. Part of my job was to see the patients, to serve them tea every afternoon, that was a highlight of the day. First thing in the morning I picked up their menu. I would say good morning about 150 times. It was very interesting to see these people come in so sick and four or five days later they are ready to go home and they look happy and they are raring to go again. It was very interesting to see who was going to be in the bed next time.

I was very, very busy during that time and there wasn’t any time left to keep up with the house and the meals and the children’s problems such as homework and shopping and buying or sewing their clothes. It was important to look after my family first, if they were in need or if I needed to be at home, I probably would have had to quit my job, but everything went along too good for me, and the cooperation from all of them was terrific.

My church is very important to me. We aren’t a very big group, we are only about 100 members, not a big congregation that you don’t know everybody that you’ve known them
everyday, since day one. I enjoyed the choir very, very much. We had an excellent choir
director and I think getting ready for two cantatas, twice a year for all our lives was really,
really good for all of us to put our shoulder to the wheel and work at it. It was hard work.

I have been in the church’s women’s group all my life. We were very involved in
missions. At one time we did hand crafts one meeting and the next meeting missions, and it
was very interesting. We had a lady that used to teach us crafts and we did that for years.
Something new every year. I also enjoyed the missions studies, and we used to present a
missions study. We have tapes now, which I’ve enjoyed more than anything, because it is on
TV. We have missionaries come and I’ve had them several times as house guests. We still
meet twice a month and I don’t very often miss any of them. We only have a group of about
15 would be the most. Some of the members I went to school with and I have known all
those years.

I also belong to a women’s club and that has been very important to me. I went to all
the stages and I was the president for our district for one year. Real interesting. I didn’t go
into it until I was retired from my job because it seemed to be a little heavier. I had to make
trips and go to the meetings out of town. But it was very, very interesting to see people from
all over Canada and the States.

My plants and my gardening have been things I’ve enjoyed. Gardening wasn’t as
much, mostly my plants. I was very involved in growing African violets, I had about 150 at
one time. I never had a big garden, but my flowers are my priority, really, and I like the
annuals best. I try out new ones but I always go back to the old ones. The rest of my home
too I am very interested in. I am still doing needlework, for my granddaughters, mostly.

I never ever thought that much about what my purpose was. I’ve been a Christian as
long as I can remember, since I was about 19 when I was baptized. I guess my purpose was
to get along with people, to be a good mother and to be a good Christian and to be a good
neighbour. My whole purpose in life is to be a good neighbour and be good to people, and
try to be a good person. I’ve always been good friends with everyone around here. I was the
Sunday school teacher, if you consider that a purpose. It was not really an outreach but it
was mixing with people and socializing. I try to have people over and to be friendly. I don’t
want for anything as far as material things or money, that never worries me, my purpose wasn’t to make piles of money. I’ve been happy, I can tell you that. I’ve never been a grouchy person I don’t think. I am a talkative person as a rule.

I do try to be a good neighbour, and I’ve always had wonderful, wonderful neighbours all around me. I shouldn’t be emotional, but I just lost my good neighbour, and we had 40 years together. I saw her, I phoned her or talked to her pretty well every day after I quit working. When I saw her, if she was over or I’d go over there, she’d say, “You and I are wasting an awful lot of time,” and I said, “Time wasted is not wasted, not when we are talking and good friends.” It is not even a year since she died. Last year when we lost her and her family and it was all over in three months, and they were gone, all three of them, it really shook us up, the whole community, the coffee party girls and all those who were involved in that family.

We have a little group that meets for coffee every Wednesday morning and we’ve been doing it for ten years. We never miss getting together. Very, very good ties. If we don’t get to see each other because of the weather, we phone each other, and tell each other how much we miss each other. We do this on a regular basis and I am not kidding. I tell you we talk, we could do politics or we could do our church work or just our families and that and we have a great time together, we just have a wonderful time. We never know what we are going to talk about, we just sit down here to talk and an hour and a half or two hours later there is, sometimes it is 12:00 when it is time to go. You can’t get along without friends, I don’t think anybody can.

I also have the Health Nurse who comes once a week to do my blood pressure and so forth and I look forward to her coming once a week. Usually somebody during the day will be coming in. I also have the phone.

It’s been hard since my husband died. It is a whole new ball game when you get to be by yourself, because I have the responsibility of the house, the car, just everything. It is just a horrible, horrible feeling, but I have to do it. You have to do what you have to do. And the quietness of the house and the idea that you are alone, you live with it. It is always in your mind that he isn’t there.
My purpose hasn’t changed. I think my outlook has always been the same, to live one day at a time and try to make the best of everyday. Society has changed. You used to be able to go and get your groceries and have lots of time to do it and now there are always crowds and so many people around. You used to have so much time at the checkout, well now they get you through, by the time you get your groceries into the bag, you are out already. You used to sit and have a visit with everybody. This way you don’t anymore, and everything is so computerized. It is efficient, but not very friendly. By the time you unload your bag, they’ve already got it down the street and we are going.

Since I’ve gotten older, if I don’t feel like doing things, I’ll just leave it until tomorrow. My purpose is to stay healthy and be cheerful. If the weather is bad and I am not going to go out, it is not worrying to me at all. I am not going to be out paying a bill that can wait until the next day. Earlier in my life, when something had to be done, it had to be done right then. The car would go, and we’d be getting it done right then. I think everybody slows down, when you are older.

I don’t think about death more now than I used to. I had the fear of the Lord put into me when they told me last fall that I would have to get out of the house and get into a unit where more people are around, so I could get them to check on me everyday. That kind of shook me up at first, but I thought, well I don’t think this is going to happen until the next six months or a year and may not happen until the next ten years because there are so many people who have their names in for these places, and there is just no place that they are going to go, so I am not worried about it. Because if I had to move the house tomorrow, I know that there isn’t going to be, because it isn’t going to happen. And if I do, I do.

5.5.2.2 Comments on Mary’s Story

Connectedness

Mary’s meaning in life was centered in connectedness. She highly valued her relationships with her children, her friends, and other church members. This connectedness seemed to be expressed in talk or verbal communication with other people. Her description of her regular coffee party gave a glimpse into the significance of talk as a source of meaning
in her life. Somehow the communication of daily life events with friends provided the sustenance for another week. In discussing her relationship with her children, she emphasized their weekly phone conversations, rather than the activities that they might share. Thus connectedness, as expressed in talk, was a primary source of meaning for Mary.

Mary’s valuing of connectedness was expressed in other aspects of her life. She noted that her church was important to her, and again mentioned friends and the life-long relationships that she had developed there. There was a sense of rootedness when she described continuing friendships with people that she had known since her early school years. Her participation in the women’s church group and in the women’s club was focused in life-long relationships. Mary’s satisfaction in her job as a dietary aide resided in chatting with the patients, and having good relationships with her fellow employees and with her boss. Clearly relationships were a key aspect of Mary’s meaning in life.

Mary’s understanding of her Christian faith reflected her strong valuing of relationships. She stated that her purpose in life was to be a good Christian, which included being a good neighbour, a good person, and being good to people. As she reflected on this purpose, she listed the ways in which she had sought to fulfill this purpose: being a Sunday School teacher, looking out for her neighbours, and being hospitable. Her emphasis was again on maintaining connectedness and on the importance of relationships.

Stability

There was little in Mary’s narrative to suggest change in her meaning in life over time. Her meaning was relatively concrete and unreflective and, as such, primarily resided in objects of meaning (i.e., in her relationships), rather than personal moral values, or life attitudes. It was my hypothesis that when meaning resides primarily in objects of meaning, it would be more likely to be subject to change as the objects of meaning changed. In Mary’s case, however, it remained stable. It seems that while Mary’s meaning was centered in relationships, she had many friends and relatives. Many of these people were life-long friends and thus remained stable sources of meaning over time. In addition, Mary had several relationships in her life, and so although her husband died, she was able to find meaning in
other relationships. Thus there has been little challenge to her meaning in life, no need to find new sources of meaning, and very little change in her meaning across her lifespan.

Baumeister’s theory of change assists in understanding the lack of change in Mary’s meaning in life. Baumeister theorized that meanings would be sustained through ignoring or rationalizing inconsistencies in one’s meanings. Mary’s meaning was centered in objects of meaning, and she was generally unreflective and unaware of possible inconsistencies. There was no crystallization of discontent, or impetus for change, without this recognition. Mary was thus able to maintain relative stability in her meanings.

Erikson’s theory seems to be the most resonant with Mary’s story. Mary’s meaning seemed to have shifted in the direction predicted by her change in roles. She described moving from intimacy in her marriage, to being generative in her caring for her children. The resumption of work interrupted the order predicted by Erikson. From Mary’s description of her work, however, it seems likely that it was more a continuation of her generative focus, rather than a return to identity development and, as such, the pattern fits relatively well. There are two exceptions. One is that Mary’s emphasis on continued connectedness suggests a life-long focus on intimacy that is woven through her changes in roles. A second exception is that there is little suggestion in Mary’s narrative of a striving for integrity. She did not struggle with despair or doubts about her meaning in life. Her faith and other life attitudes were sufficient throughout her life, and remained sufficient at the end of her life as well.

Mary’s meaning in life did not have an existential flavour. As mentioned previously, there was no threat to her meaning, and thus no existential crisis. Likewise there was little conscious reflection on her faith, and so Fowler’s stage development of faith sheds little understanding on her meaning in life. The emphasis on development of increased wisdom and generativity, in Carlsen’s theory, seems to have limited relevance to Mary’s meaning which was rooted in the concrete expression of maintaining connectedness.

Viewing Mary’s narrative from McAdams’ perspective suggests that it was quite coherent. The events in her life made sense, and are causally linked. I also found it quite credible, in that it meshed with the world in which I live. Mary viewed herself as a generative person, who was quick to help her friends and relatives. In that sense there were
elements of generative integration. Mary’s narrative was somewhat lacking in the elements of openness, differentiation, and reconciliation. Mary’s life story remained quite stable for a number of years, and she saw no need to open herself to other frameworks or aspects of her identity. Her imagoes and the other characters in her story were not richly differentiated, and her plot was quite predictable. With little differentiation, there was little need for reconciliation, and indeed Mary rarely considered the need to reconcile contradictions in her life.

In summary, the stability, concreteness, and connectedness of Mary’s meaning in life was not well-reflected in the reviewed theories.

5.5.2.3 Clara’s Story

“I played tennis one day and won the doubles championship. The next week I got married to my farmer, and that was the end of my tennis and my life in the city.”

I guess in my teen years and in my early adulthood, tennis and my work were the most important things to me. Most of my life revolved around being active in sports and just walking to my office everyday. Part of what I enjoyed about tennis was the game itself, just the joy of playing. Being able to do it. I was looking through some old stuff and I got thrilled to see my name in the headlines for tennis. I’ve actually got my name in the paper from a swimming event and also badminton events.

I loved the social part of tennis. There was a group of us, we called ourselves the Dirty Dozen, and we used to have a good time playing tennis and at our dances and just having a whale of a time and everything. And we’d dance all night on Saturday nights and stuff. And we danced to records and if you weren’t dancing you just yelled “Ladies Choice” and if there happened to be a man standing there you danced with him. We were having a wild, wild time.

There were a few fellas that I think might have been interested in me, but I was too naive to realize that they wanted to go out with me. I met my husband through my husband’s sister, and I remember the first time we went out we went to a movie theater and he started itching my palm. I wasn’t sure what it was about, but I didn’t think he was supposed to be doing it.
He was very gentle when we were going out. The first time we had sex was when I went out to his farm. I went on the train, but he met me in this little town and drove me out the three and a half miles to the farm and his mom and dad were there then. Anyway I kind of got a kick out of it afterwards, because that weekend we went out and made love under the trees at the end of the garden. It was the first time and after it I thought he must be waiting to see what his mom and dad thought before he’d get that fresh with me.

We courted for awhile and then got married. I played tennis one day and won the doubles championship. The next week I got married to my farmer, and that was the end of my tennis and my life in the city. When you are first married you get lonely and life isn’t what you think it’s going to be and you want to go home. I realized before I ever left that I didn’t just want to go back to my mom’s and dad’s, I wanted to go back to life as it was. But it just seemed my whole gang was breaking up and some of the married kids were leaving town and different things like that, there was no old gang to go back to.

The lack of social life was hard. I remember saying to him one night, “There is a dance at [town] are we going?” And he says, “Oh if you want to go, go.” And of course at age 29, I was too damn proud to get married and then have to go out to a social dance by myself, so I didn’t. After a few years I thought you weird and stupid, you should have gone and had a good time and then the next time he would have been there to make sure we were having a good time.

One time, I don’t know when that would be, but in our early married life, [my husband] would always go into town in the morning and get the mail unless it was seeding or harvest. They played pool or cards, the men, and as regular as clockwork he’d be home at 12:00. Anyway one day he had come home and we were having lunch and after lunch I started getting tidied up a bit and he said, “Oh you got a meeting to go to?” And I said, “No, I thought I’d go and have coffee with Joanne.” We lived three and a half miles out of town and he said, “The truck has been to town once.” I never, ever went in for coffee. I don’t know what the hell I would have done if there hadn’t been the church women and Home and School and stuff to go out for a few nights once in awhile.
The first time I ever went to a beer parlour, I think it was very much around the time when the beer parlours became open to women and our nearest neighbour came over and got me and took me into town. When I came back the doors were both locked. My husband wasn’t very pleased with me going out to the beer parlour.

I never went to any social dos or nothing like that by myself. We spent an awful lot of time by ourselves. We both belonged to the Archaeology Society but we belonged to the provincial body, there was no little group around our area. With him being an amateur archaeologist and the sand hills right beside our home we spent a lot of Sunday afternoons along there. It’s a lovely area, the hills are great, and I just love it. On Sundays we’d be out roving the hills and different things like that.

You look back on your married life and you think oh god I miss him so much. Yet when I go back and think of our lives at the farm....I’d be sitting at the kitchen table maybe doing books (I was secretary-treasurer to different outfits) and he’d be sitting in the front room. To actually see his face I would have to move and look around the corner of the arch. He’d be reading and once in awhile we’d both giggle at the TV. But even when he’d get up and go to bed, maybe he’d go about 10:30 or so, or 11:00, but he’d never say, “Are you coming dear,” or “I’m going to bed,” he just got up and went to bed. Then when you are here completely by yourself, you are missing this. I very much miss the security and that of having another human being to be there when you are sick, or to just be there, period.

Our kitchen window on the farm looks right down the road to town when you wash the dishes. And when I’m out there and start washing the dishes I keep looking up and thinking when is he coming, when is he coming? I go to the other side and I look out into the yard and I think well when is he coming out of the shop? I think a lot of my daily life revolved around my husband. He was a terrific man. I didn’t really realize what a good solid foundation I had, or what we had. Even though he went into town everyday, if he didn’t come home at noon hour, I knew something was wrong. He never went out to the bar or was in the beer parlour, just a very, very good solid citizen. I regret the fact that I can’t say to him, “Were you happy, were you content with me?” I’m quite positive we were but there is no way of telling now.
I thoroughly enjoyed a lot of the farm life. I'm quite masculine in a lot of ways, and I like working with machinery. Because I didn't have many babies to look after, when my housework was done then I could go and ride on the back of the combine with him. I learned to combine and I did a lot of the combining until our son was old enough to do it. I liked the physical part of doing all that.

We had two children. We adopted a nine-month-old baby girl, and had one son. They are very important to me. Once you have kids you certainly try to show them not only how to conduct themselves and lecture on how to be good, you try to make a good person to follow.

For quite a few years I was church member and a delegate to the United Church Conference in Saskatchewan. I don't believe in God, but I do believe in things that come out of the Bible. The most important part of the Bible is "I am my brother's keeper." If you need help, I should give it to you instead of saying, "Oh do it yourself, if you don't work hard enough you're not going to have it." If we don't all start doing that sooner or later, it doesn't mean a damn all the rest of it put together.

I think we've all got a godly thing within us and if we let it come out and do the things that God wants us to do, the world would be a better place, but we're all so... Take myself for example, I sit up here in this suite and feel guilty in this world, not in this city, but in this world to see that one person lives here with all this. I bought the chesterfield and that lounging thing when I came to town and I thought oh this is just great. But it's just not right compared to what the rest of the world has. Yet I look at the mansions and homes that they've got around the city and there'd be a lot of real Christian people living in these big mansions. How do they feel about it? I really struggle with that.

I have some sayings that I collect that sum up a lot of my beliefs. One is, "I saw my soul but my soul failed to see, I sought my God but God eluded me. I sought my brother and found all three." I don't mind people who've got a good faith in God, but when they are horrible to their neighbours, it doesn't go together much for me. Another saying is, "Arms are for linking." Arms are for linking not for shooting other people. When I really think about it, I'm a touchy person. Maybe that's an undercurrent with that one for me, we are to
link hands with people, strangers. Another saying is that, “All misery in the world derives from desiring happiness for oneself, all happiness in the world derives from desiring happiness for others.” I think that might be an undercurrent of motherliness. Once you become a mother you are always looking out for them, trying to do everything you can to make the babies happy and that follows out to other people and everything.

I also have very strong political beliefs and I have always said my religion is my politics and my politics is my religion. I am a strong NDP’er of the Tommy Douglas strain. I’ve supported the party and I believe in the philosophy of helping everybody. I think that helping other people really gives a lot of meaning to my life.

I guess some of the most difficult experiences in my life were losing my mother and my father. I don’t think it changed the meaning in my life, although I certainly missed them. It was just all a part of life, that they come and they go.

My husband’s death didn’t really change my beliefs, but I miss him a lot. He died on the 18th of March. He had been into coffee row and he had come home. I had taken a cup of coffee into him and he finished it and I had been in the front room and I just sort of was heading back and I heard him say “hey, hey.” I didn’t know whether he was talking to the dog or me and I turned around and looked at him and he was holding his empty mug out. I said, “The name is dear,” and went around behind his big chair and kissed him on the top of the head. I said, “You try to remember the name is dear.” He was looking up to me with a smile on his face and I went out to the kitchen. Just minutes after that he had a heart attack and died. I remember having a hard time to drape the afghan right over his head and face. It’s kind of funny when you think back because I never said anything like a good-bye to him at all. I never saw him after they took his body into the city for the autopsy and then the cremation. I miss it in a way and yet it’s kind of stupid anyway, he was dead, but I would have liked to give the actual body a hug.

It wasn’t as hard to get through the time after his death as it could have been because my son was getting engaged and everything, so that sort of filled out the empty time. My son invited me to live with them until I decided what I wanted to do, so three of us were living in
this little two bedroom place out at the farm until I moved here into the city. So that extra stuff stopped a lot of the pain.

Since coming into the city I did enjoy one seniors club over here but gave it up at the start of this year. I joined the seniors over at the University and I’ve taken quite a few classes. Well, they’re fun. I also belong to the Natural History to get out and about with them, and I belong to the Lapidary Club. I enjoy looking at the rocks. I’m glad that I can get so much pleasure out of small, simple things.

I love the big old churches and I used to go to church every Sunday but then just before Christmas last year I stopped going. I think most of it was the world situation in a way. So much of the fighting is going on because you don’t believe what I believe so I’ve got to kill you off. How, if there is a God, can he let this go on and so many innocent people, babies and things getting killed? I know that they all say this is man’s inhumanity to man, but I just can’t believe it. I also wonder if there is a God is this what he meant us to do, keep these beautiful big buildings up while somebody needs some food or clothing or something.

Sometimes I feel rather useless now. Even going over to the university, it’s something I’ve enjoyed and that and yet I wonder what good it is, that you go over and talk. I look at people shoveling snow or planting gardens and I think I can’t even do that up here. A couple of years ago I used to feel like asking the men when they were working on the roads, if I could help them. But you definitely feel useless and then sometimes I think well I should go out and get a job, but I think the young people need the jobs that are going.

I try to help people. When I was still going to the local Seniors Club I gave rides to one lady, and visited with another man. But there again, the lady I was giving rides to didn’t seem to realize that picking her up was actually taking me three or four blocks out of my way. I felt good about helping, but...I also pick up hitchhikers and I get hell from a lot of people for doing it. But I feel that none of us helping each other is what is making the world such a horrible place. I try to be sensible at doing things.

I suppose the things that make me question my meaning are times when people do something opposite to what they say they believe. My son had some friends when he was young, and their parents were very religious. But he came home crying one day because the
family had killed some extra pups by running over them with a snowmobile. With the religious part of the meaning in life and that, this is what shakes me so much. When they are supposed to be so god awful religious and they do things like that.

I am encouraged by seeing other people do good things and I still know quite a few real, in my ideals, good people that are trying to do what they can for the world. My sister has become an adopted grandma in one of the inner-city schools, and I really get a kick out of walking downtown with her, and seeing a little boy come up and call her grandma.

I guess what keeps me going is my children. I don’t feel like I’ve been completely fair to my daughter, because my son will have the land, and rightfully she should have half. But she doesn’t want to farm, and I feel as long as my son wants to farm he should have the chance. And yet, you know, to come to those terms...it still isn’t that pleasing with me. He’s going into debt and he’s also getting divorced, and I don’t think the children are safe with their mother’s family. So I worry about him and the children’s safety. My daughter is doing okay right now, she’s working and she’s getting married.

I keep going simply because of my children. To be very truthful there are times that I feel if life is not going to change for me I may as well just go jump off the bridge and then I think I can’t put my kids or people that love me through that, so I have to stick around whether I want to or not. It’s because I’m so lonely. I would dearly love to have somebody just to go and walk hand in hand around the prairie. I used to walk, but I invariably cried. I either saw things I wanted to tell my husband, or I’d be the only one walking by myself.

Thinking of the conditions of the world and the seven nephews and nieces of mine and my own kids that have to keep going in this world also gets me down. It isn’t a world I like. I think that the educated, with all the thousands and millions of educated people we’ve got in the world, surely they can see what they’re doing to human beings. It might be great for people for making money and saving money and all this stuff, but it isn’t doing anything for the human beings that are living in it. It’s much more important that you make somebody happy and contented than to make somebody a millionaire and have so much more money than you need.
I don’t have the answer. I find that a lot of people are bellowing at the politicians in the city, or in the province or that, they are bellowing at them about all the things that are wrong, but nobody seems to find any solutions to bring forth. We all know what the troubles are, but bring solutions for it. No one seems to worry about trying to find the solutions very much.

My meaning hasn’t changed as I’ve gotten older, and I don’t think I look back on my life more now. I don’t believe in life after death or anything like that. I figure when I’m dead, I’m dead, that’s it. Whatever part of me that lives on, lives on in my children. I don’t expect to see my husband or my mother or my father again. We had a good life together and that’s it. So I don’t think the approach of death affects how I view life, or changes the way I live it. I think my meaning is pretty much the same as it used to be.

5.5.2.4 Comments on Clara’s Story

Ambivalence

One of the themes in Clara’s story was ambivalence. From her account of her teens and her early twenties, it seemed that Clara found a lot of joy and meaning in socializing with other young people her age, in dancing, and in playing tennis. Her marriage, however, ended much of that life. She could no longer play tennis, or go to dances, and even her socializing with neighbours was strictly curtailed. Although Clara recognized this sudden and difficult shift, she noted that her husband was a good man, and seemed to struggle with the high value she placed on her marriage, versus the cost she had paid for it. Clara never openly acknowledged this dilemma in the interview, but instead emphasized her loneliness and the emptiness she felt since her husband’s death. She was unsure what she was missing when she reviewed their marriage, but stated that the security of having someone there was more important than perfect companionship. From the centrality of Clara’s discussion of her relationship with her husband, it seemed likely that it was the focus of her meaning, and continued to be in some sense. It was, however, placed in a background of ambivalence.

Clara seemed to struggle with ambivalence in other aspects of her meaning in life. She had been an active church member, yet she did not believe in God. She cared deeply about her children, and believed in treating them fairly, but did not feel she had been successful in
treatin them equally. She currently found some meaning in going to classes geared for seniors, yet she wondered what purpose it served to go and talk about things.

**Connectedness**

There did seem to be two central values that remained constant in Clara’s life. One was her desire to remain connected with other people. Throughout the interview Clara portrayed herself as seeking the opinions of other people. It seemed very important to Clara to remain connected with her husband, her children, and her extended family, and to have their approval. This desire for connectedness as an overarching value may account for some of her expressed ambivalence. Some principles would likely be sacrificed to maintain a relationship.

Clara’s second central value was to be her brother’s keeper. It was very important to Clara, throughout her life, to help others and to be useful. She talked frequently about the need to be concerned about other people’s welfare, and she believed that all people needed to adopt this attitude. This belief permeated her actions, and included a rejection of materialism and an embracing of helping people in need. It also extended to a desire to feel useful and to be contributing to society.

**Stability and Change**

Clara’s course of meaning in her life contained both stability and change. Her belief in being her brother’s keeper and in helping other people was present throughout her life, and remained constant at this time. Her desire to be connected with other people also remained constant throughout her life, but the form of her connectedness changed over time. She moved from being an active and fun-loving tennis buff, to being a solitary farmer’s wife, who was not encouraged to go to local dances, and who had limited opportunity for socializing. She valued this relationship with her husband, however, and when he died, her new freedom to socialize felt rather flat. Part of her meaning earlier in life was realized in being useful and helpful. She found that this element of meaning was largely vacant from her current life.

**Object-focused to Individualist**

When the shifts in Clara’s meaning were analyzed from my structure of meaning in life, it seemed that Clara’s meaning had been focused in objects of meaning. Although her
life attitudes have stayed constant over time, and provide her with some meaning, her primary source of meaning was located in objects of meaning, both in activities or object-focused meaning and in people or connectedness. It seems possible that some of the ambivalence Clara was currently experiencing with regard to her meaning in life was due to the fact that she no longer had her activities that helped her to feel useful (combining or doing the books for volunteer organizations) or her husband. With her participation in seniors classes, Clara was attempting to find a new meaning in life, not merely within the area she used to find meaning (connectedness or object-focused), but in individualism which constituted a different path to meaning. This shift was large, and may take some time before it becomes comfortable for Clara, particularly since it involved some changes in life attitudes as well (i.e., I am my brother's keeper).

Comparison with the Theories

In reviewing the theories for their relevance to Clara's meaning in life, it seemed that few of the theories captured the essence of Clara's story. Her story did not seem to be existentialist, nor did it have an overarching faith element such as might be expected in Fowler's theory. There may be some movement toward increased wisdom as suggested by Carlson's theory, but from Clara's description of her life attitudes, most were held throughout her life with little change. There was little suggestion in her story of a series of small changes provoked by life events, as would be expected from Carlson's theory.

Erikson's theory mirrored Clara's changing life roles, and generally her meaning in life shifted in a corresponding pattern of developing identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Erikson's theory was particularly compelling when considering Clara's expressed ambivalence during this interview. This ambivalence would be expected if Clara was in a stage of despair vs. integrity, and if she was trying to reconstruct her view of her life. I did not find Erikson's theory as compelling in the area of intimacy. As in Mary's story, the theme of connectedness was woven throughout Clara's life, and it assumed a stable predominance which was greater than that suggested by Erikson's theory.

Baumeister's theory of change offered some illumination of Clara's story. Clara can be seen as struggling through much of her marriage, and in other life meanings, with some
doubts. These doubts, however, did not emerge as a consistent pattern for her, and so there was no crystallization of discontent, although she came very close to this point. There were several focal incidents, which she recounted, that nearly provided the impetus for life change (e.g., her husband’s refusal to go to the local dances). Baumeister pointed out that when a crystallization of discontent emerges, an individual may feel he/she has few options for change. Indeed Clara noted that she missed her old life after her marriage, but there was no old life to which to return. Later, after Clara’s husband died, she was freed to explore new sources of life meanings. At the time of our interview, however, these new sources felt uncomfortable and inadequate, leaving her with a meaning vacuum.

Seen from McAdams’ perspective, Clara’s narrative had some coherence. She had some understanding of her early years, and her love of socializing with the Dirty Dozen. She still seemed to find it difficult to reconcile her subsequent marriage to a solitary farmer, and her view of herself as being a socializer. It was also somewhat difficult to understand her move into the city after the death of her husband. Overall, the coherence in Clara’s story was not complete. There was, however, considerable openness, which seemed to be a trade-off with coherence. She was willing to engage in various life activities, or to experiment with various imagoes. Clara’s story was very credible to me, because her experience dovetailed with many other farm women that I have known. Clara’s story was differentiated, although the characters may not be as complex as they could be, and the plot jumped from event to event, rather than being richly intricate. Clara struggled with reconciliation throughout her story, but she never seemed able to achieve it. Finally, Clara’s story strove toward generative integration, but Clara did not seem comfortable with the extent to which she had accomplished it. Overall, Clara’s story highlighted the struggle of creating a coherent, open story, which could still reconcile differences. It would be interesting to know if this interview captured a life story in change, or if this was the way Clara had generally constructed her identity.
5.5.2.5 Eleanor’s Story

"Not my will but thy will be done."

I was raised on a farm in Saskatchewan. I had polio when I was four. I remember that quite clearly even though I was little. I was paralyzed in my right leg, almost completely paralyzed at first. All I could move was from my elbow to my fingers. I came back very well. I could walk. But my right leg was paralyzed and my hand is partially paralyzed. I don’t think I was a bit frightened about it. I always took things in my stride. If it’s the Lord’s will, not my will be done. My family tried not to spoil me. My folks tried to have me do everything the other children did, and when they’d go skating they’d take me to the rink too. We had quite a large family, and it was a lot of work. I used to do as much as I could. I guess helping out as much as I could was always important.

I had a little niece that I just loved. My aunt used to have me out for dinner with them, and I’d say, “Can I iron the baby’s dresses?” and she’d say, “Sure.” She’d let me do anything to try it out. So I ironed her little white dresses. I guess I did anything, like helping with dishes.

We had a girl’s club at school and we used to raise money from candy sales. We always went camping at the lake every year with the funds that we raised. At the same time there was a boy’s scout group there. Practically every night they’d play ball against one another. I was the scorekeeper and some boys would come and sit down and watch me. Remarking on my paperwork, the score, where they were. I enjoyed that. One night we had a wiener roast. Altogether we got to know these fellas quite well.

I didn’t care for school very well. I was a daydreamer. I used to like to draw plans of houses. I’d decorate up my textbooks and put whiskers on the kings and queens or fix them up or make their hair different. Some of the teachers used to send me up to the board and I didn’t have crutches then and it would make me so tired. I could not understand why they’d leave me there so long. Then we had one teacher that was very very sarcastic, and one morning in school, he was trying to teach about a poem, and it was called, “Little things in the field yon red-cloaked clown.” He asked me the meaning of that. Well, I didn’t have a clue. So he called me a red-cloaked clown because I had a red dress on. I was very angry. I
was staying with my grandpa and grandma at the time of it, at their place. I told grandma about it and she was quite indignant to think he would say such a thing to me. He was very very abrupt, and very very strict.

I could sing, and the teachers used to have me sing at Christmas concerts, but it was always the same thing, "Little papoose in your cradle high, swung up on the dancing tree, looking down from the starry skies, tell me what do you see?" So my mother said to me, "Why do they always have you sing the same thing?" So when I went to school, they wanted me to sing Little Papoose again, I said, "Why do I always have to sing the same thing?" I don't know if she liked it or not.

I grew up in the United church mostly, there wasn't anything else. When I was at Grandpa and Grandma's there wasn't any regular church, but we had a school house a mile north, and there'd be a Methodist or a Presbyterian come in and we'd always go to church in the horse and buggy. I can remember some of the hymns like, "Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves." There's another one that I remember too. But my mother used to sing hymns to us. So I knew a lot of hymns that she learned when she was young. She'd sing them to us. When she was older she couldn't sing at all, just like me.

When we were young we used to go to dances and things. I always went along to them. Mother didn't approve of us going, but Dad liked it. He liked going and talking to the men and generally he would take us. But he was always there to look after us. He knew we behaved ourselves. Like one time a man came and asked me to dance with him and I said, "I can't dance, I'm lame." "Well, I'll hold you up," he said. And I said, "No, I'm not interested." He almost insisted and I said, "I'll tell my father on you." So he gave in.

When I was 16 I took lessons from William Eberhardt ministry in Edmonton. I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ then, kneeling down in the kitchen, by a chair. I kept it up for a little while, but I backslid for quite a few years. I taught Sunday School for 17 years during that time. I was even superintendent of the Sunday School. But I would have taught differently had I known the gospel. One lady wrote and thanked me for teaching one of her girls. I wrote back and told her, now that I know the truth I would have taught differently. I'd have taught them the gospel, instead of just stories.
After I finished school, I was at home till I was 32 years old. My cousin encouraged me to apply for the telephone office when it came open in town. The board said that they were sorry they couldn’t hire me, that there was a widow, Edna, that had three children and they thought she should have it. But later another town had to have an operator in a hurry. So they called Edna, and she went over. I had been trained by her, and I was to look after our hometown switchboard in the daytime. My mother said to me about the first day, first or second day, “Why don’t you phone Edna and ask her if you can take over the other town and she can come back home?” I did that and she agreed. So my brother took me over to the neighbouring town that night. My brother’s girlfriend went with us and she stayed with me for a night. I think just one night. Just to get me used to staying alone. I’d never stayed alone in the house before. I was all alone and I was kind of scared. I had a great big heater. You put in a big piece of coal at night to keep the fire going. I had my heater in the front, and you could see the blaze. I thought, oh, how nice and peaceful and quiet, and I wasn’t scared at all. It was quite a change, but I liked it though.

I was on the switchboard from 8:00 in the morning till 9:00 at night. I worked hard too after hours. Every Saturday night I washed my whole house. It finally got a little bit too much for me. So I just did the office and the kitchen on Saturday nights. But that wasn’t until close to when I retired.

After not too long in my first job, the board from my hometown phoned and asked if I’d come back because Edna was leaving. I didn’t want to leave the other town very badly but I went back near the end of September in ’44, and I was at my hometown for nearly five years. They finally amalgamated with the neighbouring town and I was out of a job. So one day my mother phoned and said, “There’s an ad in the paper tonight, they want a telephone operator. You’d better phone.” I got the job and I was there for over 11 years. That’s a very wonderful place. One neighbour brought me a bouquet of flowers from her flower garden every week. I had a bunch of weeds in the yard and I couldn’t stand the sight of them. Her husband cut them with shears, on his hands and knees, a great big yard, and all he charged me was $3.00 for the whole thing.
They had a Baptist church there, and that's where I got in with the Baptist church. I went when I could, but I had to work a lot. I got weekends off once a month, and I would go to church then. But I always went in the evenings. I remember wading through the snow with my crutches to get to church, and then you had to climb about six steps before you could get in. But there was a railing along the edge.

I became a Christian while I was living there. I felt the need of the Lord very much, I was very much under conviction. One night when I was alone I just threw myself on the bed talking to God. I was so happy. I had been so melancholy. Sad. But then I was raised to such heights of glory. I sang hymns. I was in bed, but I couldn't sleep. It was absolutely fantastic. I never could believe I would be so happy. In the morning I felt terrible again. I spoke to a Christian friend, and she said, "Well, the devil comes in and tries to make you believe that you're not a Christian. That's the devil, don't pay any attention." Well, it took me along time, but I finally realized that the Lord had forgiven me my sins, and I could be happy again. Believe me it took a long time. I think it was years. To be really happy. But nothing, nothing ever could take its place. Nothing.

At the end of my time as operator in that town, I was off work for a year. I had what they call a frozen shoulder. My brother died that fall of a heart attack. He just dropped dead like that. It was a terrible shock. My cousin phoned and told me about my brother. The night my brother died, I just prayed to the Lord all night for my sister-in-law and her children. My brother and I were very close. We never disagreed, well, we may have disagreed, but we always got along so well together, and he was so good to me. If he was going someplace, he'd take me with him. I was just about three years younger than he was. He was married and had five children when he died.

My mother and I went to stay with my sister when I came home in the spring. I applied for a position as an operator in another town, and I got that job. I wasn't there for very long because they were going on dial. I was there over two years and a half. Then I applied to another town. I worked there for 7 years. Then I lived there for a year and a half after that, because I was finished then, I retired. I was 61 years old and there weren't any more positions for operators.
A lady came out from Saskatoon to demonstrate the dial to the people there. She came in to the office and she asked me what I was going to do. I kind of wanted to stay in the district. I’d lived there for twenty years. I had applied for seniors housing that was being built. So, this girl came in to demonstrate the dial and she said, “Why don’t you come in to Saskatoon and live in the [complex]? I live in a bachelor’s suite, and I only pay a hundred dollars.” I couldn’t afford very much, because I only had a disability pension. I had quite a bit saved, I had over $7,500 saved, and a man came and helped me invest it. I divided it up among the years until I was getting a pension and just enough to get me through each year, you see. I made out fine. And I lived in the [complex] from 1974 till I went into the hospital in ’89. Fifteen years.

I came in to the hospital on Christmas Eve, 1989. I was 77, just about 78. I had this stroke in the night, but I didn’t know until I woke up the next morning. But as I said, I just took everything in my stride. I was in the hospital for two years almost. I came to this nursing home on the 19th of December, two years ago. The only change was that I’ve become very emotional since I’ve had my stroke. I didn’t used to be quite so emotional.

The girls and the nurses in here, we have fun together. I tell one nurse that I like to see her laugh because she shakes like a bowl full of jelly, Santa Claus. I do crossword puzzles, I like to keep busy, I like my ball games on the TV. I try to read my Bible every morning. Sometimes things hinder me, but I try to do that every day. I try to get everything out of what I read. That’s always been important, for many many years. I just enjoy it, and I like to learn what the Lord says in the Bible. I’ve made many mistakes. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So I try to confess my sins. Maybe some of them I haven’t confessed.

That Bible there on the table was given to me by a volunteer friend that comes to see me. She goes to an Alliance church. I told her my old one was in ribbons, but I certainly never expected her to bring me a beautiful Bible like that. It surprised me but I was delighted. My other one is in ragged ribbons. I’ll try not to let this one fall. I pull the table over top of my tray and then slide it off. It’s heavy for me. It’s not heavy for anybody else, I don’t suppose.
The first and foremost important thing in life is being saved and telling others about Jesus and his love and how he died on the cross to take their sins and save their souls. And he has to be our Saviour and our Lord. I think the Lord put me on earth for a purpose that I try to fulfill. I try to tell my nieces and nephews about the Lord coming soon. I try to explain things, but I don’t think I explain it clearly enough to them. Maybe I do, I don’t know.

The longer I live, the more I see about my faith. Like on Sunday night I always watch Vision. A lady had a sermon that was just suited to me exactly and she just raised me to the heights. It just made me very happy. I’m more dependent on the Lord now than I was before. I’ve grown in believing what He says and trusting in his word. I suppose there have been some other changes in my faith as well. There’s places that I wouldn’t want to go, that I had gone to before like dances.

When I think of what’s important to me, I think of my family and friends. Having my sister in the city means a lot to me. I have a lot of pictures of my great-nieces and nephews that I enjoy. I have a friend that comes to see me every week. I think he’s wonderful to look after me, in my chair, a crippled old lady. He’s so kind and thoughtful, he’d do anything for you. He takes me around and shows me things. We look at the different pictures that they put up on the wall. He likes to go down for coffee, I don’t like drinking coffee, but I go with him, and then we go out and sit on the main floor where those chesterfields and chairs are.

Friends have always been important and always will be of course. All my friends have been very good to me. I got to know a lot of people, and kept in touch with them. When I’m discouraged, I think having my friends and my sister come to see me cheers me up more than anything. I just love to have them come. I’m disappointed if they don’t come. I think they know I appreciate it very much. They’re so kind. One brought me a Bugs Bunny at Easter time, and then the chocolate bunny was from a girl I went to school with.

I boarded a teacher, and she married the brother of this girl that I went to school with, and I was responsible for that. But that’s a long story. I got them back together and it was a very happy marriage. She lived with me for a year and a half and we’re about the same size. If I’d get anything new, why I’d have her model it for me. So she could wear my clothes. I
never tried any of hers on though, but I’d have her put on anything that I got, and see what it looked like. He died seven or eight years ago now, and she’s a widow. She still comes to see me. So friendships are extremely important.

I’ve had a lot of losses in my life that have been very hard on me. My father, my brother, my mother, my sister. My sister wanted me to come in to the city so we’d be close together. We liked to play scrabble together. There was a neighbour lady who used to play with us. They’d get such a kick out of it. I remember one time they caught me with a “q” and they had a “u” and they were scheming together not to let me get that “u.” And so they caught me. They thought that was great fun. We used to have lots of fun playing scrabble.

I don’t think my polio had many effects on my life. Not very often did I ever wish I could walk or run. I just knew I couldn’t and that was it. My stroke I just took it in my stride like I say. I didn’t feel badly or anything.

I don’t think I’m old, I think I’m a young girl yet. Although I’m beginning to feel as though I’m getting old. I used to smile from ear to ear. Now my mouth is a little stiff, and I can’t talk as well.

I do think more of things that happened long ago. I remember things my mother used to say, little expressions and things. For example, if there was something that was not quite right, she’d say, “A man on a galloping horse would never notice it.”

I just take death in my stride, that’s all. I’m just here for maybe for today, and may be gone tomorrow. I just take it in my stride. The Lord will call me when he wants me. I just live from day to day, just live for a day at a time. The Lord takes care of the rest.

5.5.2.6 Comments on Eleanor’s Story

Faith

Eleanor’s life attitude was simple: Not my will, but the Lord’s will be done. This philosophy gave meaning to every aspect of Eleanor’s life because she believed that the events that occurred in her life were controlled by God. It was not up to her to chart the course of her life, rather she allowed her life to unfold as God willed. At times, this life attitude translated into a passive rather than active approach to challenges such as finding a
job. At other times, I was struck by Eleanor’s grace and humility that came from her Christian faith.

The things which gave meaning to Eleanor were her faith, her family, her friends, and her work. Eleanor’s faith was a key element of her meaning in life. It provided her with personal moral values and standards by which to live her life. It provided her with comfort and happiness in a life which seemed to have had more than its share of sadness. She felt a sense of purpose stemming from her faith, which was to tell other people about Jesus. It was also through the church that some of her visitors come to brighten her day.

There was a significant change in Eleanor’s faith. Eleanor noted that her first conversion experience occurred when she was 16. She did not feel that it was genuine, and she noted that she quickly backslid. This suggests that there was some shift in personal moral values, and in life attitudes, but that these quickly reverted to a previous status quo. Then in her mid-life, Eleanor experienced a second conversion, which seemed to represent a significant shift. She noted that she was raised to the heights of glory, and that she had never before experienced such joy. The next day, however, her melancholy and sadness returned. With the support of a neighbour, and likely her church, Eleanor was able to persevere with this second commitment, and to make life attitude changes which remained throughout her lifespan. In our conversation, I was not able to identify dramatic changes in lifestyle or beliefs that occurred as a result of this second conversion. Eleanor, however, obviously considered it a major turning point in her life. In terms of my meaning in life structure, it seems likely that there were some changes in personal moral values, in life attitudes, and the object of meaning of her faith.

Eleanor had three personal crises which could have been existential turning points, but were not. Her experience of waking up paralyzed as a young girl of 4 seems to have been accepted with realism, and without bitterness. It became a given of her universe, and thus not an existential reality to be questioned. The sudden death of her brother, to whom she was very close, could also have been experienced as a crisis. She did not perceive it in this manner, however, and instead accepted it as the Lord’s will, and prayed for her sister-in-law. Finally, waking up almost completely paralyzed at the age of 77 could have been a personal
crisis. Eleanor, however, accepted this as the Lord’s will, and was gracious rather than bitter. It seemed that all of her life experiences were able to be incorporated into her world view without difficulty.

**Connectedness**

Eleanor’s relationships with other people were very important to her. She valued ironing dresses for her aunt, trips with her brother, scrabble games with her sister, joking with the nursing staff, and matchmaking friends. In particular, Eleanor was quick to point out the kindness and generosity of others, and as she spoke, the description of someone else’s kind act would move her to tears. Thus both the companionship of friends and family and their small acts of kindness were particularly meaningful to Eleanor.

Friends and family and the kindness of others seem to have been stable sources of meaning for Eleanor across her lifespan. Although she frequently moved, she was able to develop new friendships, and to maintain familial ties, which allowed these objects of meaning to remain stable.

I have placed Eleanor’s story within the connectedness grouping of paths to meaning. It could be argued that because of her strong faith element, it should be placed within the transcendence grouping. There was an element of transcendence in Eleanor’s story, but the predominant tone of her narrative was on concrete connections with other people and with Jesus. The spiritual, mystical quality, and “other-worldness” which I have used as a criterion for transcendence was largely missing, thus I have placed her narrative within connectedness.

**Comparison with the Theories**

Eleanor’s story seemed to have an existential element in her dramatic conversion story. There was an earlier belief system which was challenged, likely by an existential given of guilt, and found to be wanting. A new belief system was constructed around Christianity, and in particular the Baptist church. Her new belief system did not seem to be more authentic, because it did not incorporate more of the existential realities of life than her previous system. It did meet one of the criteria of Frankl’s theory in that it provided her with an increased sense of purpose.
Baumeister’s theory provided some illumination of the process of maintaining meaning. To a certain extent, Eleanor was able to deny difficulties or contradictions of her faith, in order to allow her to maintain it. Baumeister’s theory did not illuminate her two conversion experiences because she did not describe any processes such as a crystallization of discontent that led up to her conversion.

The conversion experience and the resultant centrality of faith in Eleanor’s life was also resonant with Fowler’s theory. It was difficult to see the stages of faith development in Eleanor’s story, and to that extent Eleanor’s faith was not illuminated by Fowler’s theory. Eleanor’s faith, however, occupied center stage in her life. It was through her faith that other activities were understood, or found to have meaning. In this sense, Eleanor’s faith provided her with an ultimate environment as suggested by Fowler.

From the perspective of McAdam’s theory, Eleanor’s story was resonant with Mary’s story in many regards. It was a simple story of struggle, conversion to faith, and a finding of identity within that faith that was sustained throughout her lifespan. Because of Eleanor’s construction of her story through a fundamental Christian belief system, there was considerable coherence and less openness. I found it quite credible, although at times I wondered if I would have found a life story that recognized the effects of polio upon her life (e.g., it was probably a contributing factor in her remaining unmarried and being quite dependent on her mother) as being more credible. Eleanor’s plots and characters were not richly differentiated, and the reconciliation that was required was supplied by her Christian beliefs (i.e., “If it’s the Lord’s will”). The generative integration of Eleanor’s story was somewhat less than in other women’s narratives and seemed to be centered in telling other people about Jesus. This was likely partially due to the fact that she was paralyzed and unable to be actively caring for others.

Eleanor still felt like a young girl. Although her mouth could no longer stretch across her face and her hair was not in long braids, there was a part of Eleanor that was still a young girl. Eleanor’s meaning in life also stayed stable across her life span. As her physical environment became more confined, the sources of her meaning became more restricted as
well, but the essential nature of her meaning as found in her faith, family, and friends, has stayed the same.

5.5.2.7 Connectedness as a Central Theme

Connectedness was an important theme in all three of these women’s stories. There were unique manifestations of this theme, but relationships and maintaining relationships were central to the meanings they found in their lives. It did not seem that the stability and centrality of connectedness was well-reflected by any of the theories that were previously reviewed. Some of the work from the Stone Center, in particular Jean Baker Miller’s (1991) writing, refers to the self-in-relation, or to other concepts of women’s development being placed in the context of their relationships. It would seem that for these three women, the development of meaning in life could fruitfully be explored as occurring within relationships. The Stone Center work, and its relation to the participants’ meaning in life, is explored more fully in the discussion section.

5.5.3 Faith Changes, Altruism Remains

5.5.3.1 Hannah’s Story

"I think it is sort of a sense of justice that guides me more than anything else."

I was born in Ontario on a farm, and we moved out west to a farm in Saskatchewan when I was five. I went to school in the country, elementary school and then went into high school in the city, a collegiate there and went on to University. It was just assumed by my parents that all the children would go to university. My father, while still a young man living in Ontario, had been asked to be a candidate in a federal election. He turned it down as he did not think he had enough education to serve as an MP. He then decided that none of his family would have to miss such an opportunity because of a lack of education. We all attended university.

I went on from my undergraduate degree and took the first two years of Medicine. I was always sort of interested in anything in the medical field. Science wasn’t my best, math was my best subject right through high school, but I wanted something where I would be
working with people, rather than sitting in an office all day doing accounts or something. But the Depression and the Dirty Thirties came along and my father being a farmer, we had no money whatsoever, and no student loans then, so I had to drop out. It was disappointing, but there were lots of people suffered a lot more than I did. We always had enough to eat.

The Dirty Thirties were tough times, but maybe it taught us that you could have a good time with very little money. That you didn’t have to have material things to enjoy life. We used to have marvelous times out on the farm going to country school dances where a few people would take down the desks and pile them up at the back of the school room, and we’d all dance. Usually somebody would have a fiddle and someone would have a uke or something like it, very primitive sort of music, but we used to have fun.

I began working as a Lab. Tech. My first job was in a veterinary clinic, and my second job was in a hospital. I can remember going in and talking to the Medical Superintendent, and telling him that I’d be glad to work for two months without any salary if I could be taken on. He said well they really did need more staff so he took me in. So I worked under the pathologists there for a couple of months without any salary and then got taken on.

After that I went to work at a tuberculosis sanitarium and I really enjoyed my time there. There was a wonderful spirit around. Everybody practically on the staff put themselves out to be good to the patients, it was real nice there and I think we all felt sort of caught up in it—Saskatchewan was a pioneer in the fight against tuberculosis. And we all felt we were part of it. I think we were, if not the first, one of the very first places where they gave free treatment for tuberculosis...first place in the world I think that it had been done. So we felt good about our work.

My husband ran a jewelry store in the area and he had been a patient for years and years. He spent quite a bit of his time around the San, and that’s where I met him. He used to say he was living on borrowed time, but we had nineteen years together and it was good.

We’d been married about two years, when my husband came home one day and said how would you like to run a summer resort store? I said well that would be fun, I always had a yen for going into business. It was fun. So I looked after this store for how many years?
About four or five years. By that time we had two children and I decided it was just a little bit too much for me.

We had five children altogether. I had my children quite late in life, really. Three of them were born after I was 40. When I think of moments of joy, I think of when each one of my children were born. I love little babies. I was just so thrilled with them every time. There is nothing more interesting than seeing a small child develop, even in the first few weeks of their life, it is just amazing. I used to think oh isn’t she or he beautiful, I must have another one right away, and then I’d think, well I’d better wait a little while, and be sensible about this!

I think bringing up my family probably has been more important to me than anything else. I think they’ve all turned out to be pretty good people, and that is very satisfying. You have your problems along the way but then usually the thrills and satisfactions of what they are doing and what they have accomplished more than makes up for it. And its mighty nice to know when you’re older that you have a family that cares about you and my family has been very good to me.

It was while my children were still small that I joined the Catholic church. My parents were originally Methodist and then United Church. I was brought up and I used to go to Sunday school in the United Church, but then when I went to university, we used to question a lot of things there, including our religious beliefs. I think for a long time I was an agnostic. But my husband was Catholic and I used to envy the faith he had and the friendships he had within the church. His faith seemed to mean so much to him, and to be such a comfort to him. He never doubted that there was another world and that after he died he’d be going to it. I began to pray, not knowing whether there really was a personal God or not but I began to believe there was. I can’t express it any better than that. I seemed to be given faith. I think that gave more meaning to my life.

I think my husband and I had a good marriage. We had our odd problems occasionally, but by and large I was very fond of him. He was good company. But we sold the jewelry store and moved up to Saskatoon because his health was slipping. He died a few years later from complications of the tuberculosis treatment.
When my husband died that certainly changed my life. I don’t think I changed as a person though. I missed him, I missed him very much because we would always talk about the children, and sometimes I could hardly wait till he got home to tell him some funny thing that they had done. After he died I had no one to share these things with.

I think my faith made it much easier to accept the loss of my husband. I sort of felt I had a lot of responsibility on my hands, bringing up five children, and I wondered if I’d be able to do it. And I can remember a priest said he’d always believed that when one parent is taken that they often can do more for their family by their prayers in heaven than they could if they had remained on earth. I always remembered that and in some way I used to think sometimes when things went better than I expected that maybe there was some truth in that. It gave me some hope.

I remember my mother came up and I told her that I sort of dreaded the future and she said, “Don’t let me ever hear you say that again, you’re so fortunate to have all those children.” Afterwards I thought well really that was a very wise thing to say because you did have something to look forward to, something that made life meaningful.

I was fortunate in that my children were all in school by that time. My youngest one was in grade 1 then. They were all in school and we had enough money that we wouldn’t have starved if I hadn’t gone out and worked. It would have been pretty grim though, and I had a chance to go back to work, so I went, but it was sure tough, after being away for twenty years. Many of the techniques were still the same, but there was a lot of other work I had to catch up on.

When I was there, I guess about two and a half years, I was sent to the States to learn about new techniques and research. It was a marvelous institution and they were very good to me as a Canadian coming down. I liked it for more reason than one. I learned a lot of new things in those four weeks, but also it was the first time I’d ever taken a long trip like that, and I really enjoyed it.

I worked there for fourteen and a half years, and then retired when I was 65. Shortly afterwards I went and visited my daughter in Africa, they were with an international aid agency, one daughter and her husband. Then I had a trip down to Papua New Guinea and
that was an interesting trip. And I took one to the West Indies. Before I retired I got involved with Save the Children as a volunteer, and so when I was in the West Indies I got in touch with our different people who were working there on our programs and I visited them. I also stopped off at Hong Kong and visited with some of the staff and sponsored children there. Save the Children no longer sponsors individual children, but at that time it did. Then I had a trip to Europe to visit another daughter and her husband. Her husband was on sabbatical and he was studying in Europe, so I went over there. It is very handy having family that live away.

Traveling strengthened my thoughts about the terrible injustices that there are in the world. When you think of the slums that I saw in the Philippines and again in St. Vincent in the Caribbean....I remember visiting one woman, she and her daughter were living in a little one room shack which would be about half the size of this living room and they shared it with about a dozen chickens. What a dreadful dreadful place to live.

When I am at home I’ve been involved in a number of organizations doing volunteer work, mostly with Save the Children. I’m still their treasurer and have held various positions and organized the fund-raiser projects. As an organization, we decided the best way we could help children was through Community Development Programs. We asked them, we don’t go in and tell them what to do, they usually know themselves what to do, what will help them best. And we go in and ask them and then we help them in whatever way we can. We have a country director now in each of the country’s we work in. And it may be to build a school, may be to get better quality seeds so they can produce more crops in rural areas, maybe a revolving fund that they can borrow from and start up small businesses and it may be in the health field, it may be to get them clean water.

My family started sponsoring a child way back in the early ‘60’s, because I thought it would be good for my children to be in contact with a child in the developing country that was poor. I can remember them being really shocked at this poor thin paper that they used to write on, and it brought it home to them. Most of my children are more or less interested in that kind of work, so I think maybe it did have an impact on them.
I also support an organization that promotes peace. I was reading the other day that, I forget how many billion it would take to bring basic necessities to everybody in the world so there would be nobody starving. It was several billion, but he said that is only three percent of the amount the world spends on the military. You know it’s terrible, isn’t it? You’d think that mankind is crazy.

I’m also interested in environmental issues. I belong to the Environmental Society here. I’ve done the odd little thing for them, like worked at a table at the Children’s Festival a couple of years, where we had brochures and different things to hand out to them.

I guess the volunteer work I do for organizations gives most of the meaning in my life. I don’t do much to help individuals. I do help a blind man that lives down the hall here, I read his mail for him everyday, a few little things like that for individuals. I guess it is pretty well the volunteer work I do. I think I am doing something worthwhile, and I think all these organizations that I am involved in are good.

I think it is sort of a sense of justice that guides me more than anything else. I think it’s so wrong that there is such terrible poverty and such wealth and the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. It’s justice rather than equality, because there are so many things in which people are not equal. We’re not born equal, in abilities and what not, but we should all have equal opportunities. But how much a sense of justice guides me, I’m not sure. We live in this Western World and here am I, living in, I suppose by western standards, this would almost be a humble setting. In comparison with the slums that so many people live in, I’m living in luxury. It’s not fair, it’s not just, and how far does it guide your life? I don’t know, it certainly guides it to a certain extent, but how much I don’t know because it’s not exactly equal sharing, is it? Not many of us are willing to live in the most humble circumstances in order to share with others that are so hard up.

I don’t really think about these things all that much, I’m not a reflective person. I’m busy all the time, I always have stuff ahead of me to do. I have slowed down a bit, though. As you get older, at least I’ve found, I just haven’t got the endurance I used to, I just tire out after a few hours work. So it is limited what you can do.
I don’t have as many friends as some people do. I was just too busy for years and years to develop too many friends. I don’t have nearly as many friends as I did a few years ago. I went to two funerals of friends last month, and it was surprising how the numbers dwindle down. You don’t seem to make close friends as you get older, not like you do when you are younger. At least I have found that. I think you just haven’t got the energy and the desire to get out and do things with people. I’ve been very lucky I’ve had good health, but I still can’t do nearly as much as I used to.

I’m not sure if my meaning in life has changed over the years. I’m doing different things from what I used to do. For years my meaning and purpose pretty well revolved around my own family, I didn’t have too many outside interests. Now my family are out on their own and I don’t do very much for them. But I think my way of looking at things hasn’t changed that much.

I don’t think I ever do feel very discouraged or hopeless. I think I could if I were in different circumstances, but I have good health, I’ve never starved, I’ve never been desperate in any of these ways. I’ve been very fortunate. If I knew that there was nothing but pain and suffering ahead of me, I’d probably feel discouraged but I’d have to think, well, I’ve been lucky most of my life after all, we can’t expect to be lucky forever. You’ve got to, I think you’ve got to expect and accept the fact that life is pretty much a gamble, you can’t always expect everything to go your way. The Depression made us realize that you couldn’t count on everything going clear sailing.

If I could give a young person a piece of advice, I’d tell them not to make the acquiring of material things the most important thing in their life. Because I think that a lot of lives are spoiled by people that just think that they have to work and work and work in order to gain more and more money to get more and more worldly things. But I think there is a lot more to life. I think you get a lot more satisfaction being a good neighbour than getting some new furniture.

I do think about death more since I’ve gotten older. For one thing I go to a lot more funerals. But I don’t dwell on it. Because after all it is part of life and we all know it is.
5.5.3.2 Comments on Hannah's Story

Altruism

Hannah's life story was remarkable in its straightforwardness, simplicity, and integrity. Hannah generally lived what she believed. She believed in a sense of justice, and it was reflected in her actions. She was heavily involved in and committed to her work with Save the Children. Its philosophy of respectfully assisting communities in developing countries resonated with her belief that greater equality of opportunity was an important goal to work toward. Likewise her belief in peace resulted in supporting an organization that promoted world peace, and her concern for the environment gave rise to her assisting an environmental organization. Thus, Hannah displayed a consistency between her stated beliefs and her actions. Both her beliefs and her actions reflected the path of meaning of altruism and her commitment to assisting other people.

Hannah's meaning was also marked by action. Hannah noted, "I don't really think about these things all that much, I'm not a reflective person. I'm busy all the time, I always have stuff ahead of me to do." She stated that most of her meaning now came from the work that she did for volunteer organizations. At one time it resided in the care she provided for her children and in her work. In both cases it reflected an action-oriented meaning, rather than a reflective one.

Hannah perceived that the demands of her family and her children, and now the demands of volunteer organizations, may have resulted in her having fewer friends than other women. She did not seem to miss this source of meaning, but acknowledged that for her it was not possible to maintain an activity-oriented meaning and a large number of close friendships.

One of Hannah's attitudes which seemed to permeate her life story was thankfulness. At many crucial turning points in her life, Hannah responded with thankfulness. When she was not able to continue medicine, she was thankful that she did receive some education, that she had enough food, and that she was able to find work. When Hannah's husband died, she missed him very much, but she was thankful for her children. This thankfulness did not seem to be a projection which masked her inner hurt or disappointments, but rather a natural
expression of her life attitude. It may be that this attitude of thankfulness acted as a well-spring or renewable source of energy for her altruistic activities.

**Stability and Change**

Hannah felt that her meaning in life had both changed and remained stable over her life. She noted that her circumstances had changed. At one time her energies were focused on her children and on her work, and her meaning primarily resided in caring for her children. Now her children no longer need her in the same way, and she was active in volunteer organizations. Thus the activities which filled her time were different. Hannah noted, however, that she did not feel her way of looking at things had changed.

In terms of my structure of meaning in life, Hannah’s life context had certainly undergone several changes, and her change in activities reflected these changes. Her objects of meaning had also shifted somewhat. When her husband died, one of her objects of meaning was taken from her. Although her children still provided her with meaning, they were no longer the focus of her activities. Her volunteer work seemed to have assumed greater importance. Hannah’s personal moral values including her belief in equality of opportunity, a sense of justice, a lack of materialism, a desire for peace, and for intellectual stimulation had not changed. Likewise her life attitudes of thankfulness, realism, and dedication showed little evidence of change. The path to meaning of altruism had also remained stable throughout her life. Thus Hannah’s life story reflected both change and stability.

**Comparison with the Theories**

Hannah’s life story resonated with many of the theories. In particular there were similarities with Erikson, Carlsen, and Fowler. Hannah spoke of her life in the same stages as Erikson outlined. She established her identity in her work, married and began the process of intimacy, and became generative as she devoted herself to raising her children. She returned to work, but it seemed from her talk that to a large degree her children were still the central focus of her life. Hannah’s life story gave little indication of the stage of integrity vs. despair. She was still pursuing activities congruent with her sense of justice and she had little room for the reflection associated with integrity and little tolerance for despair.
Hannah seemed to have moved toward the increased wisdom, generativity, flexibility in thought, open-mindedness, and transcendence that are characteristic of Carlsen’s view of aging and meaning. Carlsen’s work, however, seemed to have connotations of facing life events or life crises and thoughtfully responding to them in a manner which promoted the development of the above characteristics. As Hannah avowedly stated that she was not a reflective person, there was some discrepancy between her path to meaning and that discussed by Carlsen.

Hannah’s faith changed over her lifespan, and it seemed to have changed in the general ordering proposed by Fowler. She moved from a faith received from her parents, to a period of individual questioning and agnosticism. She then came back to her faith, which somehow seemed to be given to her, and found comfort, reassurance, and hope in it after her husband’s death, when the responsibility of raising five children weighed heavily upon her. Hannah’s religious beliefs and her description of her faith, however, lacked some of the centrality which seems necessary for Fowler’s theory. Her belief which provided her source of motivation for most of her actions seemed to be her sense of justice, and Hannah did not relate that to her religious beliefs, although it may have been.

Hannah’s story seemed to have little overlap with existential theories or with Baumeister’s theory. Meaning was found in several roles, as proposed by Baumeister, but there was little sense of a process of sustaining meaning, of a dawning realization of inconsistency, or of meaning vacuums. The most significant meaning vacuum seemed to have been created when her husband died, and even then there was not a predominant sense of despair that might be expected. Likewise there was little evidence of a dramatic existential turning point. Instead there was a continuity of thankfulness.

Hannah’s story showed considerable development of all of McAdams’ standards. It was coherent in its linking of life events into a plot, but Hannah remained open to new ideas and new experiences. Her story was very credible. Her characters and plot were fairly differentiated, although they were not as complex as they could be. There was little in her life that she was currently attempting to reconcile, but from her examination of the death of her husband, it would seem that there were times in her life when she needed to reconcile
events and beliefs or themes. There was a strong sense of generative integration in her desire to support Save the Children, environmental groups, and peace initiative.

Hannah’s life story seemed to exemplify many characteristics of Erikson, Carlsen, and Fowler’s theories. In particular, Hannah’s life circumstances and resulting changes in meaning fitted closely with the pattern proposed by Erikson. Her life attitudes were captured well by Carlsen’s theory and her faith changes were reflected in Fowler’s theory. Hannah’s life attitude of thankfulness and her action-oriented meaning welling from her beliefs, however, add a richness and depth to her story which were not as well reflected in the theories.

5.5.3.3 Zara’s Story

“When you can hold your head up, that is dignity.”

My ancestors come from Kashmir in the extreme north of India, but my grandfather migrated to Kenya. I grew up in Nairobi. My parents were both devout Muslims, and by the age of six we had all read the Quran and learnt all the prayers. But my father was fairly broad minded, and my mother was quite modern because she had left India and been transplanted in another country, so she couldn’t follow all the traditions of India.

I studied in the mission schools and government schools, and my education was all in English. Although I lived in Nairobi, the exam papers came from Cambridge, because it was a British colony. For further study I would have had to have gone to India or England because there were no local universities at that time.

When I was a child, I mixed with European children, African children, Chinese children, and Japanese children, right from the beginning. At home we were always taught that everybody is equal, no religion is better than ours and our religion is not worse than the others. Human beings are all equal, no one is big or small in God’s eye. If you respect other religions they will respect yours too.

I used to go with my father to places when he was speaking. As a child, I remember hearing him saying that you must respect everybody’s religion and try to understand it.
Living in the narrow confines of only your own community all the time is like having no window in your home. You get detached from other people and you must not do that.

When I was eight-years-old, my father died. He was only a young man, and my mother brought us up as a single parent. She couldn’t afford to send us away for schooling, so I had to take teacher training. My mother got cancer and she was very sick so she felt that I should be married before anything happened to her. I was the only girl, and I’m a Muslim in my religion so marriage is a religious obligation. I didn’t do the same to my daughters, but my mother felt that I should be married. It was the way I was brought up, that was the right thing to do, and then I could go on studying afterwards. I couldn’t say I just want a career and I don’t want to get married. So during my teacher training I got married. I had my 18th birthday and my husband!

In my tradition, your parents decided and sought a husband. I would say 100% marriages were arranged by parents, but as far as the Muslims are concerned it’s never done without the consent of the girl. You are allowed to see the man in the presence of elders, you could meet, but there should be other people there, no dates and no going out. Automatically you presumed that was dignified and your parents were going to choose.

I could have said I don’t want it, but I didn’t find any fault with the person that my mother wanted me to marry. Now I was brought up that way and there was no problem, but I didn’t bring my children up that way. They follow the same Muslim religion, but I have been more liberal in a lot of things. So I said they could choose anybody they want to marry. Although I was brought up very religiously myself, over the years I started thinking for myself and I didn’t want it that way. I wanted my daughters to be freer than I was.

In the beginning, I used to believe every word my husband said. I absolutely believed it because I was only seventeen and a half when I got married. I was trained not to argue with him. Over the years I found out that I could argue with him. Now I argue with him and I tell him I live in a free country.

My home is very important to me. I was offered many, many jobs in the government to go abroad on my own, but I would not leave. I found that was very important that my husband and I should be in the same town.
We've been lucky that we got to spend a lot of time with each other. Because our children went away to boarding school at a very early age, there were just the two of us. We felt that we became nearer, whereas if I had had all the children at home, I would be tending to them and probably not much time for my husband. We were not interested only in the house and parties and fun, we were interested in improving ourselves and all sorts of things. I was very lucky to get a husband who also was broad minded. We also worked very hard because having three children in boarding schools in England is not easy; for years we couldn't take holidays or anything. I found we brought us together. We always looked forward to the children coming home, their letters, and all of that.

It was a very difficult decision to send the children away at an early age. We wanted them to have a better education than what we had. I was very worried at one time, I thought maybe they'd get very detached, but I was very lucky. They are independent, and they all are in different countries now, but we have contact. There is also a lot we have lost. We did not see them growing up, and every time they came back they were a little older. I felt at that time that it was the best thing to do for them. Now I think if I had to do that again, I wouldn't do it, I'd be with them because I missed so much in that time, although we have kept in touch.

I was trained as a teacher and I've taught in both primary and secondary schools. After some time I did stenography and I was a legal secretary. While I was working as a legal secretary, the governor nominated me to the City Council, as a councilor. I worked for a year in the council and then the following year the country went for the first direct elections. Some of the councilors asked me to stand. I was very surprised. I was the first Asian woman elected representative. I was a member of parliament for nine years.

Some of my early experiences were what drove me to politics. When I was in school, you stood at a separate bus stop and the European children stood at another bus stop. You were not allowed to go to certain schools because of the colour of your skin. That stands out as not a very nice experience. Another thing was that whenever the British needed any people to work, for instance when they started schools they brought people from India. When they started hospitals, they brought in Indian doctors. In all the rural areas the doctors
would be Indian, but all the top jobs were for the European doctors. So you see when you grew up with that kind of thing, and then when you came into politics, you wanted nothing of that. There was so much anger, not anger, but you wanted to break all that, and it was a very nice feeling to have broken it at least in one small country.

It was making history with all the exciting events I’ve seen. I saw one by one all the racist institutions going, the schools got united and became one, the hospitals got united and became one, and the teaching institutions.

I feel that the human dignity was something that I learned during that time. Before that you were always made to feel your culture was inferior, your language was inferior, you were inferior, obviously, not personally me, but everyone of my type. Now when you felt that you could stand with your head high and say we are just like everybody else, that kind of thing is human dignity. A person’s dignity is very important to me, whether a person is black or a white, that is immaterial, but a person that is really important, and I would work for that. I have worked for that all my life and I would work for that. A man is a person, not a means to an end, he is an end in himself.

We also made our state a secular state. The state has no religion, but the people can have any religion they like. We opted for socialism and immediately made university education free. We found that we had hundreds of children going up through the school system, and the bottle neck would be narrow, only five would go to university from these 100. So we broke the bottle neck in the middle and expanded the education this way and then made it so that most children could go to university and then we could have more teachers to come back and work in the primary and secondary schools. We had very good planning for a few years, but it didn’t go right all the way. What went wrong was that we attempted too much. We had a very exciting time and then we also had a very depressing time when things didn’t go well.

That period when I was in politics was a very important period, because that’s when I really learned about the world. I learned how world politics really worked, the poor countries and the rich countries and all the hypocrisy. I also remember seeing the big places and meeting all the people in politics. It elates you but at the same time you feel very humble to
have experienced it all. It makes you feel how insignificant one is because the problems of
the world are so much that you can’t help it, and that frustrates me. When you go to India
and you see on the one side wealth and then you go and see all the poverty and very poor
people and all side by side and it is tolerated, that is frustrating.

I retired from politics because of a conflict of interest between my husband’s job and
my holding office. I joined UNESCO, United Nations, and I was involved in a literacy
project for functional literacy. I worked with experts from several different countries, and
that was another learning experience. It was in the rural area and it was a pilot project for
functional literacy to teach farmers and peasants reading and writing. I was with UNESCO
for about four years when my husband got transferred to a different country. There was a
community college near our home, and I got a diploma in the teaching of short-hand from
there. Then I taught in two colleges in Kenya. My last job was in Tanzania, teaching and
training secretaries. When I retired I started to write and finished three novels in manuscript.
My husband had to retire for health reasons.

We came to Canada because of my husband’s health. It was again a difficult decision.
We had already made arrangements for our retirement and we were very happy to retire in
Africa. We thought that the children would come and visit us and we’d remain there. But
because of my husband’s illness we had to move to Canada. Here our whole lifestyle has
changed completely. It took me a long time to get used to a small apartment. I find the walls
are so near because I am used to a big house. Saskatoon is also a bit far away from my
children, and I miss them.

I’ve continued to write since coming to Canada. I always had this desire to write.
There are some things in life I’ve enjoyed, and some things I have not enjoyed, but the
expression of it is very important to me. The expression itself is important. Some people
paint, I’ll write. It gives me a lot of satisfaction. I feel that I have more opportunities for my
writing in Canada. I find those are the pluses.

Since I’ve come here, I’ve picked up so many labels. There is racialized women or
women of minority or colour. In Africa, I was just a writer, if it came in the press, this is
Mrs.--- the writer or the parliamentarian. But nobody referred to my colour or to my religion
or to my race. Here it is mentioned in many articles, racialized women and minority and women of colour. I am very uncomfortable with all of that, I just want to be a human being. If I become a Canadian, I want to be a Canadian, I don’t want to be anything other than that. As long as I have my freedom to go, to wear this, to eat whatever food I want to, to live wherever I want to, then I have no problem, you see, with that.

I didn’t have any problems settling down in Canada. I can communicate, I can talk, I have shelter and I can go and bring something to eat and have books to read and all that, no I haven’t found any difficulty. I found that I’m not going to be dead if I don’t have Indian friends because I find that I can make friends wherever I am with people of common interests.

One thing that does bother me here is the lack of knowledge among mainstream Canadians. This ignorance of the world, that I find quite a lot here. We didn’t have very many material things, we lived in not very grand houses, not very grand roads, not very grand shops, in our shops you could buy not as much as you can buy here, but our minds were broader. I have been always seeking for knowledge. My son always encouraged me, and he’d bring books and say read this and read that. Because you know I wanted to go to university when I was young, and that was one of my disappointments in life that I did not go. I tried to go a couple of times as a mature student, but because of political situations it didn’t work out. I really regret that.

My religion is very important to me, but many of my beliefs have changed. I used to think for myself even as a child. But if I felt I was doing something against religion, I was frightened that I was going to burn in hell. When I got rid of that idea that I’m going to burn in hell, then a lot of things became easy.

Religion is a very, very, personal matter and somehow I find I have never been able to accept a lot of things in religion like people do. Mine depends on intellect, not on faith. It started with faith but it has not remained faith later on. As you went on and you saw the world and how things were in the world, that had an effect on you. I was in India when India was partitioned, because I went to see my husband’s family. I got stuck there, and then I came out from India to Pakistan as a refugee. I saw the millions get killed. Now when I see
on the television the situation in Bosnia, I cannot respect religion very much when I see all these things which are being done in the world, whether it is my religion or it’s some other religion.

This Indian experience changed some of my religious practices. At that time I would be prayer five times a day, and doing all the things that a Muslim woman should do. After that I found that a lot of things ceased to be important, and I said I’m going to do what I like. I am still a Muslim, I pray in the Muslim way, I go to a Muslim Mosque, but I don’t rigidly follow things that maybe I am supposed to follow. The experience made me feel that religion is not doing much good. When you read history, you realize it has been happening since time immemorial.

I’ve studied every religion and I admire a lot of things in all the religions, but when other people start thrusting their own religion on you and tell you theirs is better, that is where I disagree. I remember even as a child I didn’t think that one religion was better than another. I felt that if you were good then you would go to heaven, but I didn’t think that good has to be only Christian and Muslim, it could be anybody.

I taught my children the ethics of religion. I’m not worried about rituals and frills. When they were in boarding school in England, I made sure the principal of the school knew that I didn’t want them to have any intermediaries to their God. I wanted them to have a direct relationship with their God, they don’t need any intermediaries, like the priest. I encouraged them to read about all religions and also their own, and they could then decide for themselves.

People are always talking of purposes in life. I have still not found what is purpose in life. But as you go you change, it is a changing process all the time, your personality changes. Especially when you move about and you widen your circle, instead of just staying in one place, your horizon widens automatically.

I don’t even feel that there should be a purpose in life because I feel you live according to the circumstances and the way you are. A lot of things you don’t decide for yourself, they are decided for you and you make the best of the things that are given to you. If you don’t have purpose in life, you are very lonely sometimes, you know you are going to be alone
sometimes, but then you have to learn to cope with that aloneness. If you don’t think like everybody else, you are alone. If I break a lot of those traditions, then I am alone.

The closest thing to purpose would be love of God, your creator and then love for your family, those who are close to you, tolerance, forgiveness, understanding, and things like that, that are part of you in life. But I don’t consider my family a purpose, I think it’s just part of me. Like this is a finger, but it is part of my whole body and if it hurts I’m hurt. I am still looking for purpose, and I may get it or I may go away without getting it, or I may have it and I don’t know about it.

Circumstances have changed me very much. I did not go deliberately to change myself. I change and you change also, it is just like the world going around. I have changed in the sense that when I was very small like I wore only the Indian dress. Now I don’t wear only these, I wear the English dress, I wear African dress, I wear European clothes. I eat my own food, I eat African food, I eat Chinese food and I eat all that. I am married to a man who’s half Chinese and half Indian. Some things I’ve taken his, and some he’s taken mine. When I first moved to Canada, I told a neighbour that my husband doesn’t make his own breakfast, I give him breakfast. It was true at that time, but it’s not true now, he makes it now. See how quickly one changes.

I find human beings, they act so differently in different circumstances. When you are in the middle of war, all your purposes will be very different. There are revolutions, you see people dying of starvation, then all these things change. So I have never been very comfortable with meaning of life because I’ve not understood it myself. I don’t think I could dare to give anybody advice, people have to decide for themselves. You give some advice now and tomorrow things are different and your advice may not even be valid.

We’ve gone from one country, lost everything in one country and then we’ve gone to another country and started life right from the beginning. It has become a challenge, but we did feel the loss of it. With Muslims we have a prayer for everything, you don’t say it loudly, but it is like a reflex action, you sip food and you have to say a prayer. Thank God, in three small words, to start and to finish in everything, entering the house, going out of the house, for walking on the road. It is a constant prayer and it is so much in you all the time. You are
told to bear hardship, create stability, and don’t get excited if things don’t go a certain way. Consider it a challenge. I think here people get excited for very little, little things, which would mean nothing to us. My neighbour was grumbling away about a packet of milk which was broken and I said to her, “Where I come from we are grateful we have milk, we don’t worry about the containers being broken.”

My faith in God provides encouragement to me because I feel that we human beings can have direct contact with God. I don’t mean a Christian God or a Muslim God, just I will say God. When I’m very down and I just want to be on my own, I’ve come here. I don’t want to go to a church or anything. I just sit here and be quiet, meditate and it passes. I feel that you can have direct communication with your maker. I’ve had experience of that in my life. It shook me.

Once when I was visiting with an aunt of mine, they were going through very bad times. The night I went there, there was no food in the house. We didn’t know and they had kept absolutely quiet about it. That night I think we had half a cup of milk each, and the children hadn’t had lunch and there was no food at night. I remember my uncle got us all together and he said, “Pray and tomorrow we will have something.” Maybe he was expecting money from somewhere, but that is what he said. We all slept thinking that tomorrow God was going to send us food. This happened at about 8:00 when we were going to bed. At 10:00 or 11:00 that night there was a knock on the door and somebody came and said, “Oh, we are very sorry for the short notice, but there is a wedding tomorrow.” They were apologizing profusely for not bringing cards and the short notice and all that. The next morning when we got up and went to the wedding, I remember there was so much food in that house. To me at that time that food was sent by God. I’ve had other experiences like that one.

I do think back over my life more now, and that is where my writing comes from. I remember both good and bad, but mostly it is good.

I remember when my younger daughter nearly died, after an operation. She had 107 temperature, which is Fahrenheit, normal temperature is 98. She was to have surgery. They had to bring real ice and put it all over her to lower her temperature. I kept on saying ice,
more ice, more ice. I was very calm and they said, “Should we send for your husband?” or I would want to send for a priest, because they thought she was dying. I said, “No priest and not my husband.” He would start yelling at the nurses that they have been neglectful and who wants the priest here? “I don’t want a priest, all I want is ice, ice, ice.” The fever broke after two hours, and I nearly collapsed myself. Then my husband came in the morning as usual. One of the Muslim nurses came to me the next day and she said, “I have never seen a mother like you, you never prayed for your daughter. Most mothers would kneel down, just kneel down and spend all the time in prayer and you were just helping us with the ice.” I could not give her any answer why, I didn’t even think of God. When I think of it now, I feel maybe it was God that was making me say, “Bring ice, bring ice.” You don’t have to appeal to God only by kneeling down, he’s already helping you, and that was what was wanted the ice. There have been some other very, very dark moments like everybody else, like you have deaths in the family or you have very serious illnesses like my husband was very sick a few times. Your world was tumbling down, but you held on.

I know death is coming, but what frightens me about death is not dying and afterwards, but the act of dying. It worries me because I don’t want a painful death, I don’t want a violent death, I don’t want to drown. I’d rather just sleep, but what happens to me after death doesn’t worry me. Although I should be worried according to my religion. I have been very sick and I have been at the point of death, and I find that somehow the only worrying part was that I don’t want pain.

I think my life has been just like everybody else’s, a life of success as well as failures all together. I find that in life there is good and the bad. You have a lot of bad luck and then good luck has to come again. It is like a cycle. There are rare cases where you always have bad luck maybe all your life or you always are lucky to have good luck, those are the exceptions, but normal human beings have a fair share of bad luck and good luck.
5.5.3.4 Comments on Zara’s Story

Freedom and Dignity as Motivators for Altruism

The meaning in Zara’s life centered around the life attitudes of freedom and dignity which seemed to provide much of the motivation for her altruistic actions. Zara described early childhood years in which her freedom was curtailed. Racism imposed an external infringement on her freedom, and Zara experienced waiting at separate bus stops, and was made to feel that her race was somehow inferior to the Europeans. Internally Zara’s faith imposed some restrictions on her intellectual freedom. As Zara noted, once she was freed of her belief that she would burn in hell for her intellectual transgressions, she experienced considerably more freedom in exploration of her faith beliefs. As her faith beliefs changed, it gave her more freedom in choosing what aspects of religion were rituals and frills, and what aspects were essential ethics. This created more choices and freedom in lifestyle. Zara also described some encouragement of freedom in her early years. Her father was broadminded, and her mother, although religious, did not follow all the traditions as strictly as she might have done. Zara also studied and read widely, and this learning, which continued throughout her life, gave her considerable freedom in her thought. During her adult years, Zara continued to appreciate freedom. She was thankful for a broadminded husband, she continued to enjoy learning, and she worked toward increased freedom for all people during her time in office. Zara currently resided in Canada, and she noted that as long as she had the freedom to dress, to speak, and to live as she chooses, she can and will be happy.

Closely tied to freedom was Zara’s belief in the dignity of persons. Dignity was not a purpose in Zara’s life, but it was akin to a purpose. For Zara having dignity was when “you could stand with your head high and say we are just like everybody else.” After having her race and religion denigrated during her childhood, Zara, the woman, rejoiced in the accomplishments of her time in office, when official racism was broken. Dignity also included respect for the equality of all races and religions. Zara noted that even as a child she believed that all religions must be equal, and her father reinforced that, “They are all there, like God’s religion.” While Zara’s faith was undoubtedly very important to her, the intellectual freedom that she attained from it as a child and young adult allowed her to respect
and love other religions. Thus the development of freedom in Zara’s life, particularly religious freedom, was closely tied to the development of the importance of dignity, and her willingness to work toward it in society.

Change

Change was very important to Zara, and it was closely linked to freedom and learning. Zara valued change and to a certain extent sought after it. She noted that she was a very changeable person, and thus could not conceive of having a set purpose or mission in life. Zara experienced considerable change in her life, both in external circumstances and internal to herself. Her father died when she was young, she was married to a man who was from a different culture, she was in India during the partitioning, she herself brought about many changes when she was in power, and she moved frequently throughout her lifetime. Zara’s love of learning, and her constant desire to learn more, attested to her fondness of intellectual change and stimulation.

Change did not, however, always come easily for Zara, as was exemplified in her changes in faith. Zara’s faith seemed to be a significant part of her identity, and she did not readily make changes in it. In her statement, “When I got rid of that idea that I’m going to burn in hell, then a lot of things became easy,” it was possible to sense behind her words the fear of a young girl, and the difficulty with which she found the freedom within her religion to change. Likewise as an adult, Zara described the aloneness that she sometimes felt, “If you don’t think like everybody else, you are alone. If I break a lot of those traditions, then I am alone.” Intellectual and faith ideas seemed to have a life for Zara. They were not empty words which she could easily take up or put down. Rather they penetrated into her being and became a part of her, and when they were challenged, the challenge was directed at part of her identity, not simply at the belief. Zara’s ability to allow herself and her faith to be changed gave her increased freedom, which in turn created an atmosphere in which more faith, attitudinal, and identity changes could be fostered.

When the change process in Zara’s life was considered via my structure of meaning in life, it became clear that there were many sources of change, and many avenues in which change was evidenced. As mentioned previously, Zara’s life context changed dramatically
through her life. She provided a wonderful summary of how change occurred through circumstances, “But you know as you go you change, it is a changing process all the time, your personality changes, then you meet a man, you live with him and his family. Then especially when you move about and you widen your circle, instead of just staying in one place, your horizon widens automatically.” Zara’s life story was one in which her life circumstances changed. Equally as important, however, was that Zara was open to the changes in her faith, and in her beliefs. As we have seen in other women’s stories, without this essential characteristic of openness, change still occurs, but on a different level. Zara’s change was not only in her life context, or in her objects of meaning. Change also occurred in her personal moral values and in her life attitudes. An exemplar in both of these areas was her faith. Thus change in Zara’s life was beautifully complex, just as stability in Hannah’s life had a beautiful simplicity.

Comparison with the Theories

Zara’s changes in her meaning in life resonated with many of the theories. There appeared to have been an existential shift which occurred following Zara’s witnessing of the partitioning of India. A religious world view was dismantled, and a new world view was constructed which included religion, but which also included Zara’s new intellectual understanding of the world. This new construction would likely be considered to be more authentic by existentialists. It did not, however, include a new purpose, as would be suggested by Frankl. This type of reconstruction of life meanings also had similarities with Baumeister’s theory of change. The partitioning of India provided the focal incident around which the story of religious change was constructed. The fluidity and change in Zara’s life was also reflected in Baumeister’s belief that life was constant change. Zara’s story also resonated with Carlsen’s theory. As was mentioned, in addition to the dramatic existential shift, there were smaller shifts in meaning throughout her life, as she remained open to change. In particular, Zara seemed to have grown in wisdom and in generativity. Finally, Zara’s faith and her world view seemed to be quite connected, and as such had the centrality of a faith that would be associated with Fowler’s theory. Zara’s faith journey mapped onto Fowler’s theory quite well, as she moved from her parents’ faith, to her own internalized
beliefs, to questioning, and then to a new faith which had more room for paradoxes. In summary, Zara’s meaning in life was fairly well-captured by existentialist theory, Baumeister, Carlsen, and Fowler.

From the perspective of McAdams’ theory, Zara’s narrative was resonant with Hannah’s, but there were some differences. Zara’s story was not as coherent as Hannah’s. There were more loose ends, and more events that were viewed as fate rather than causally linked. Zara’s story demonstrated more openness. She married outside of her culture, was willing to travel, and sent her children to school overseas. Zara’s story was very credible, and it was richly differentiated. There were many plots, subplots, and numerous themes, peopled by interesting characters. Zara seemed to be continuing a process of reconciliation of her beliefs and her life events. There was not a strong drive, however, to complete this reconciliation. She was content with unanswered questions. As in Hannah’s story, generative integration was a strong component of her life, including her time in politics, her work with UNESCO, and her continued writing. Zara’s development of identity through life story seemed to be quite rich.

5.5.3.5 Comments on Stability in Altruism and Changes in Faith

Hannah’s and Zara’s narratives displayed an altruistic path to meaning. The philosophic underpinnings of this altruism remained stable across their lifespans (i.e., sense of justice and dignity), although the manifestations varied somewhat with changes in life roles and life contexts. One manifestation of Hannah’s altruism early in her life was the financial support of a child through Save the Children. After her children were adults, she began to volunteer, and at the time of the interview much of her life activities were centered in volunteering in organizations to promote the well-being of other people. Zara demonstrated an early concern for the dignity of all people, and entered politics as a means to promote dignity and equality, regardless of race. Her involvement in the development of literacy demonstrated a continuation of this concern. Her strong beliefs in dignity and equality remained important at the present time, as did her continued commitment to altruism.
Hannah and Zara evidenced significant change in their faith beliefs. Both struggled through challenges to their faith, and each ended up embracing a faith which was different from what they had previously held. Zara’s was more satisfying from an intellectual standpoint, and Hannah’s was more satisfying from an emotional standpoint.

Hannah’s and Zara’s stories were both well-captured by the theories of meaning in life that have been reviewed, particularly in relation to their faith changes. It is interesting to note that these women were relatively abstract thinkers, fairly intellectual, and were open to experiences. It is suggestive that the reviewed psychological theories were designed more for this population of women than for women who perhaps have a more concrete thinking style, and who stress relationships over intellectual ideas.

5.5.4 From Connectedness to Transcendence

5.5.4.1 Sally’s Story

"Life is a journey."

I was raised on a farm in Manitoba. I was born probably with very limited vision. It’s likely that I always was near sighted and had an extreme astigmatism from the day I was born. I was a clumsy child, of course, I tripped over things and I didn’t do well in school. People thought I was retarded or slow or something, and I was treated as such.

I went to stay with an aunt one summer and it was she that discovered that my vision was bad. I remember her taking me back out home when my holiday was finished and her telling my mother that this child was “blind,” and there was a great screaming war between the two of them. I think my mother imagined her older sister was telling her how to run her life. I was sent outside to play, but I heard all of the words. I remember being brought into the house and my mother poking something into my face and saying, “Can you read this?” Of course I read it and then her saying, “Well you’re not blind you can see perfectly well. You are just being bad and trying to get attention.” So I realized bad children can’t see, and good children can see. So then I didn’t tell anybody I couldn’t see.

I hid it until I was 13. I memorized the eye chart at school, so when they had me read it, I told them. I have a wonderful memory, and I could memorize anything. When it was
found that one of my sisters had a vision problem, they took me into Winnipeg to test my eyes. My father went with me, my mother didn’t. We went into the office and the doctor put the chart up and he got me to read it. I read what I knew was on the school chart, which wasn’t on this chart. I had less than 15% of my vision left by the time they caught me, and I had these huge coke bottle glasses. I went from the poorest grade to the highest marks in the school in the following year. The difference of eyeglasses was quite interesting.

My mother was a very, very dominant person. She didn’t allow any alcohol in her home. We went nowhere there was alcohol, so we missed weddings and social events ‘cause somebody may drink there. I think she might have come from an alcoholic home. She tells a strange story about her father being wealthy, and frequently wandering off and disappearing. She said it was because wealthy people aren’t responsible, but that’s not a good reason. He also made a lot of bad investments, and went through his money very quickly. It sounds like he drank. I would suspect that’s why my mother was so severely against alcohol of any form and that is why there was no alcohol in or around the house. The alcoholic attitudes were there though. Everything was a secret in my house, like you couldn’t tell the neighbours our “business” whatever our business was. When I couldn’t see properly, you were just a bad kid and it will go away if you don’t deal with it.

I started off in a country school and actually the closest school to us was four miles away. We took lessons at home until we were old enough to walk the four miles, which was decreed to be age 8, and then we walked to school and back at night. I went to a composite school in another town for my grade 11 and 12. It wasn’t a boarding school, it was only a boarding home. It was run by the United Church. You went from the home to the school and were severely supervised and had to be in everyday at 4:00 and all that good stuff that usually goes with religious institutions.

Then I went to a Normal School, which is Teacher’s College, and took something that they were offering in the early ‘50’s, because after the war there was a shortage of everything, teachers and whatnot. I took a short course in education that allowed me to teach one year and then I had to come back and take other education. I didn’t want to do that, that wasn’t my choice, that was my mother’s choice. I wanted to go into nursing but my mother’s
opinion was that nursing was not an honourable profession for women, because they may see men’s private parts. Teaching was the only decent profession for women, so I took it and then I took a scholarship school. It was up north in an isolated area which meant they’d pay my first half tuition when I came back down. When I was up there and got some taste of freedom, I decided that it was garbage, that teaching was not my field and it didn’t matter any longer that I didn’t have to do precisely as I was told. So I came back down and went to work in a tuberculosis sanitarium and in those days tuberculosis was active and there was a lot of it.

I applied to a psychiatric hospital to go into their psychiatric nurse training program. I never did go. I was accepted and couldn’t get my act together enough to do it, so I didn’t go. I needed a signature from a parent until I was 21. It wouldn’t have been forthcoming because my mother refused. Especially a mental hospital, my God, I might get hit in the head by some crazy people. I never pursued it beyond that. I let it go and continued on fiddling about working in various hospitals.

Then I started traveling, a friend said, “Let’s work our way across Canada, this will be great sport. We’ll go to one small town and we’ll work for awhile and then we’ll go on to another.” A lot of women were doing that in the ‘50’s because jobs were easy to get. You could walk into a town if you had anywhere decent training and you could have a job tomorrow. We thought a starting point would be Brandon and then probably onto Regina, and then hit the major centers. But she got tuberculosis and so she ended up in the Sanitarium. I fiddled about waiting for her, I went as far as Regina actually, and worked there in a medical arts clinic. I waited for her, but she never recovered. She was in for a fairly long time and in the meantime I met a man and married him. So that was the end of my traveling.

I met this man, and at the time he was in the Armed Forces. In those days young men joined the Armed Forces and went over to Korea or wherever the battles were. He was with the peacekeeping forces that went to Germany after the Second World War. A lot of young guys did that and then he got a free tour of Europe and came back. I met him in Regina pending discharge and marriage followed a year or so after that. Not wildly exciting. It
probably was really exciting at the time, but looking at it from hindsight, so big deal. So then I became a mother three times in fast succession.

I guess what stands out for me from that time was that I knew I made a big mistake in my marriage, and I wasn’t very happy. My husband was drinking quite heavily, so I went back to work, when my last child was born. I think I went back when he was six weeks old. I went back with the idea that it was up to me or else my kids wouldn’t have a chance. So I was 25 and going on 50 in those days. At the time when I went back to work, we were living in an unmodern house and his jobs were very low paying and he drank a good part of what he made. But with three babies, one doesn’t want to live in an unmodern house and haul water. By going back to work, I could control some part of the income and provide for my kids to an extent that I wanted to.

I think one of the best things that I could have done for my children was to give my children their freedom. When I realized I was in an alcoholic marriage and I realized that my children were in trouble, and I went out and got that job to clothe them and feed them, I also started to prepare my children to look after themselves in the best way that I knew how. I had the idea that my children were going to get away and I wasn’t. If I was trapped, they would be safe.

I guess I realized that something was wrong in our marriage around this time, but I didn’t know what was wrong. I remember I went to the Public Library and got some books and I tried to find something on alcoholism, and I couldn’t. The only thing that was in the Public Library in those days, this would be in the early ‘50’s, was a little narrow tract called Bill’s Story. It talked about a man who had hit bottom as an alcoholic and he founded Alcoholics Anonymous. The only other thing I could find about addictions dealt with drug addictions, and so I read all the addiction books that I could find. Some of that fit, but I also thought my husband was probably a sociopath. He had no feelings about anything. He had very old world ideas and it was his way or no way. Anybody that had any emotion at all was considered sentimental or a “suck.” I remember him laughing about a guy that worked with him because the guy was almost in tears because his wife might have cancer. My husband thought this was amusing, that this person would get this upset, because adult men don’t cry.
The friends he had drank as heavily as he did. This city was where he was raised, and the people we knew were his friends of long standing, so I was always sort of the outsider.

My husband was always very glamorous, he had been in Europe, and he’d been all over England and Germany and the Netherlands and he’d been up in the Arctic. He knew how to dress well and he knew how to sit nicely at the table, and which fork to choose. And I was a farm girl. You get to buy into the attitude that you don’t really know what you are doing. You buy into the attitude that this person knows best and this must be the way things are because you are just a farmer and dumb farmers don’t know anything.

When I started earning money, he’d also at that time got a job with the city. I think that some responsibility came for him, or he needed to pretend at least he was responsible so he settled down for awhile while I was working. He said he drank because he was concerned about his income and if I worked that helped pay for the bills and he didn’t have to worry about paying for the bills. After awhile when I worked long enough, he started drinking again quite heavily and he said he was drinking because he was lonely and because I was never at home. So I quit my job, and stayed at home and then he drank because he was concerned about who was paying the bills, so I went back to work again. We played that game off and on and that’s a standard story of an alcoholic marriage. It is up and down and around. But it’s a disease of course and there’s not anything anybody can do about it without getting help for the person.

Because of that stress, I did get ill and I would have to stop working for awhile. One time I had a couple of bouts with pneumonia. I made a deal with him one year when my kids were in their early teens that if he didn’t drink in front of the kids, I wouldn’t bother him about it. He drank as much as he wanted to outside of the sight of the children was the deal we made. But once the kids were gone the drinking accelerated. I got a fairly good job then, a switchboard job, and I was making for once decent money.

I guess I’ve always had a degree of independence and that helped me to cope. I guess the other thing is that I always had a sense of humour. I’ve always been able to laugh at where I am. That always sees you through, because I used to say well I’m too old to cry so I might as well laugh about it. I can laugh at a lot of the situations or I can find something
funny about them or something amusing around me that maybe I can just leave them aside and look at it. So the ability to horse around has always been in me, I’ve always had that sense of humour. When things get bad if you can find something amusing somehow connected with them, it helps.

Just before I left my marriage, my parents had a car accident during the Christmas season. My father died in it, and my mother recovered but was very badly off. I think it gave me some courage to say that there is her life kind of buggered up and here I am still doing this stupid thing and I need to move. I need to look after myself. There was something to do with that death that gave me some sort of freedom to move. I think it pushed me into making a change. It was not the first loss because I was 20 when my grandmother died. I was not very close to her, so it meant something but not a huge amount. My youngest sister died when I was maybe 30. She got polio and died not a lovely death. There was a whole bunch of stuff for me there in that one too, but not enough to move me then to any great change. But my parents’ car accident gave me some kind of freedom or energy to move.

I had started asking for the marriage to end before that. I asked for counseling first, and then when he refused counseling, I asked for a separation. We went through a year of him asking for second chances, and me going along with it. Then of course he would drink again. I would call him on it, and he would say, “Well if you have to leave, we’ll separate but let’s wait until after Christmas,” and then he would say, “Well, no, let’s wait until after the kids come home for the holidays.” Eventually I decided that the only way that I could leave was to leave by myself.

The other thing that gave me energy to move, was that when I started to work at my new job, they treated me with probably more courtesy than I have ever been treated with in my life and my self-esteem came up quite a bit. They also asked me good questions. One time I said, “Gee I’d like to walk home tonight, but I have to go home and make supper.” I remember someone saying to me, “Well how much longer does it take you to walk home than if you take the bus?” I said, “I don’t know, maybe 15, 20 minutes.” They said, “Geez what’s the matter if supper is 15 minutes later than it usually is; what happens? Does the clock strike or does the ax come down?” And I started thinking, yea, how come? Because
when you live with alcoholism you go through a whole thing of self-esteem, it is my fault, if only I did this better. You hear it enough times and your self-esteem goes down the drain and mine wasn’t wonderful to start with. So when they started to ask me these questions I had to stop and think and say yea how come.

When I started standing up to him, then he started to threaten some degree of violence. He never ever actually hit me, but he did kick furniture, hit walls and things and that is when I decided I’d get out. A book I read later said that when you start resisting these people, they often become violent. I went to the Public Library, I am a huge reader you see, and I got some books and started to read up and there was one book called *Scream Softly So the Neighbours Won’t Hear*, and it was about a battered situation. It chilled me and I kept finding similarities and yet I didn’t know why because I wasn’t being hit. But the battering was emotional, it wasn’t physical battering as such.

So I moved out into an apartment the first of June and he killed himself on the 26th of June. And I guess that was another milestone in my life.

I went to Al-Anon for awhile. A friend invited me and I went for about a year. I didn’t get a lot out of it because I was damned resentful about being where I was. Upset because he chose to kill himself and my father who loved to live was killed. After I had been away from Al-Anon for a couple of years I went back, but I looked at a different group which was also a help. I think the group that I went to were very old-fashioned and stuck in their ways and this was a younger, more flexible group. I got some grasp on things from it, and it was certainly worth going. I went for about four or five years. Then I realized that I was repeating myself and I needed to move on and learn from it.

My daughter also found herself in an alcoholic and abusive relationship. When my daughter phoned me and I heard the screaming and yelling in the background, my first words were, “Get out of the house and go to a neighbours’ and phone me collect. Like now, don’t stay, get out now.” She told me what was happening and I sent her money to come home with. Her marriage, my marriage, and my son’s marriage all ended the same year.

I guess something that’s given meaning to my life is grasping knowledge. Every once in awhile a little door opens up and you say to yourself, “uh-huh.” And that is important. A
little door opened for me and said I have to get off my butt and go get a job or my kids don’t have a chance and that was a little bit of knowledge that came to me. Another door opened when I went to work and they acknowledged me as an individual and asked me some good questions and I started to think for myself about things. Every once in awhile I’ve picked up a book and I’ve read the book and I’ve said, “Oh ho, there is something here and I never thought about that,” or it’s opened up a door.

The meaning or purpose in my life is based on the fact that I believe that my life is a journey that I am on. It is up to me to carry on the journey and discover all of the things that I am supposed to know. I don’t believe that it is necessary for me to know the whys or the end result. I may find out some answers from time to time, but whether or not I know what it is about does not make it any more or less valid.

I also believe that there is a power stronger than myself who may be guiding me, or at any rate watching over me. I believe my journey is unfolding a story or is a step in some larger plan, it is not important for me to know the purpose of this plan or the outcome. I believe my life is just a blink in the overall plan of things.

My sense of meaning has changed over the years. I have always had this sense of some overall plan, but would not have been able to be so clear about it as I have become in recent years. I doubt that I would have been able to even verbalize this belief. I think I needed to go through a number of experiences before this journey became clear to me.

There have been a number of losses in my life, some of a rather traumatic nature. I believe each time that I passed through some new crisis and survived it and was able to move forward I gained strength and a sense of self-esteem which helped me to keep moving ahead. Some time in the area of a major crisis I learned the concept of living for today, and allowing the day previous or the ones not yet here alone. There were many people who helped me to practise this concept, some of them were in the Al anon program.

Moments of joy seem to have a lot less impact on my life than the times of great difficulty, when I have to locate my inner resources and draw on them. Moments of joy or peak experiences serve to refill my bank and give me new strengths to draw on in time of
adversity. Nature is almost always a peak experience for me, seeing and touching. I feel very close to a spiritual being, the grand master planner, if you will.

The experiences that have confirmed my sense of meaning in life are very difficult to define. They are always of a spiritual “mysterious” nature. They usually come through other people. I call them my gifts. I have learnt that I receive many little gifts throughout a day, it is therefore not always just one thing but a combination or accumulation of events. I have learned to watch for my small gifts and to say thank you for them when they arrive.

I always know that something is going to be okay in the end. I don’t know what that is, fate? Whenever I got into a corner, I always knew I was going to get out of it somehow. Maybe it was even something outside of myself. I don’t mean you to think that I sit idly by and let it come and get me. I run at it head on. I believe if I am aware, or open, certain opportunities will come my way, certain events will happen which are out of my control but I need not sit idly by. I can draw on my inner resources, listen to my inner voices and act on my best instincts. I do not believe my job is to sit on my tail and let a higher power do everything for me. I believe that the power will give me the strength or courage to get up and do the things that I must do for myself. I can also trust that things will evolve as they are supposed to if I do my share.

There’s not anything to disturb that sense of meaning because it has nothing to do with external forces. It has to do with the internal things. It used to be that things would really throw me, and make me really upset, and, not at good harmony with myself. I think a person has to get into their own skin before they get settled down.

I can’t do for anybody else unless they ask me. Invariably when you do for somebody what you think they want, it may not be true at all. It’s what you want for yourself and not what they want. I do what other people need me or ask me to do, but I don’t take on jobs that are unasked for. If I do what they want me to do, I have to make very sure it’s good for me first. If it’s not good for me, I’m not going to do it. Some time ago I came to the conclusion that the biggest job I had was to keep myself safe. If everything isn’t at the core of keeping myself safe, then I’m not succeeding.
I’ve always hoped for my grandchildren that I’m going to be some sort of resource that they can use if they get into trouble. Rather than having a clingy relationship, I would sooner be a resource for people. Strength when they needed it and comfort when they wanted it.

I also feel responsibility toward the environment which is why I’m involved in environmental things. But that’s leaving something behind for my grandchildren.

I used to live with a great deal of fear, fear that somebody won’t approve of me, fear that somebody won’t like me, fear I can’t do this, fear of whatever. You don’t have a life at all with fear. I don’t think that you have to live with fear. If you know that there’s certain things you can’t change, things external to yourself you’ve got no control over, then you don’t muck in those things. You change what you can.

It’s important to live your own life. Everybody’s got their own journey and they have to live it to the best of their ability. And nobody can live it for them, you can’t live anybody else’s for them. They live their own journey. I think everybody’s got a journey, and we do our journey as well as we can and we don’t step on other people’s journeys.

I probably wouldn’t have always said that. I don’t know what I would have said. That’s so long ago, that seems like another plane and I am not there anymore. But I probably thought there was some mysterious answer and I would have to have the answer to it. A lot of time things happen in our lives and we have no idea why they happen. And sometimes things happen to our lives and we don’t have an idea but we find out years later why. That they might be important. I think there always is a why, but I don’t think we have to have the why. I don’t think it’s important for us to know always.

I believe that you have a spirit and that the body dies but your spirit lives on. You can’t erase the spirit because you never know who you touched. You have no idea. It might have been somebody you just passed walking down here and smiled at, and changed their life. And whether or not you get to come back or whatever you do, I have no idea about, and I really don’t care. I guess if you’re remembered for the good things you did in life, at least the things you did that changed somebody else, or helped somebody else, that’s all that’s important.
Certainly age changes things because you learn more things. And the further I walk the more things I learn. When you begin at the beginning of a journey you only have very few resources. You gather them as you go.

I don't think back over my life a lot because that's one thing that I learned not to do when I got into Al-Anon program. I knew that I was dwelling a lot in yesterday, and spending a lot of time wishing I'd done something different. And I spent a lot of time doing a lot of very active things to make myself not go back. Sometimes we do get stuck. Consider yourself climbing a mountain and you've hit a snag where you can't get up over it so you sit on the ledge and you dangle your feet for awhile and rest. And then sooner or later you'll see another way to go around it. And continue on. People waste their time and their energy wondering why, worrying about yesterday, and all that's wasted energy.

The approach of death doesn't influence how I live my life. I think about death, and I've talked about death, I think it's part of the realism of getting in touch with your own life or journey. And I've met death so many times. I worked in hospitals and the tuberculosis sanitarium, so death isn't a stranger. I don't find it scary. I don't think the way I live my life has anything to do with what happens. After you die, I think your spirit lives on. I think that your physical body certainly dies and rots and becomes soil. I think we all live forever and we can't do anything about that either. If only in somebody's memory.

There is a story about ocean creatures who are living on the bottom of the ocean and holding on for dear life. One creature lets go and floats free. Everybody sat back and said, "It's so wonderful." And it wasn't, all they had to do was let go. It just allowed itself to be carried with the waves. Those creatures still holding on to the bottom thought it was some sort of a mystical being. There is another story of a man that is leading the multitudes. He finally decides he's tired of pleasing everybody, and he needs his own life. He comes out to the multitudes, and he says to them, "What would you say if God told me that I should suffer and I should give all my worldly goods away?" The crowd yelled, "Oh, yes." Then he said, "What would you say if I told you that God had asked me to go through a different type of hardship," and the crowd agreed. Then he said, "But what would you say if I told you that God had told me that what I had to do in this life was just go forward and be happy." And
they were horribly disappointed because they didn’t want to know that that might be somebody’s purpose in life. Was to just go forward and be happy. They needed to think that it would be some sacrifice. And so what he did was he took off his hat and sat it down and said, “I quit.” Then he went away whistling a little tune.

5.5.4.2 Comments on Sally’s Story

From Survival to Transcendence

Sally’s story was one of tragedy, survival and growth. As Sally understood her life, a number of external circumstances combined to create an atmosphere which fostered her development of a disbelief in her own judgment or abilities. These circumstances included poor vision, which resulted in Sally being labeled as stupid, a dominant mother, who disapproved of Sally’s choice of occupation, and an abusive husband, who undermined Sally’s confidence. I have labeled this early time as survival. This is not a path to meaning, but it reflects the predominant need for Sally during this period.

Also planted with the seeds of self-doubt, however, were the seeds of growth. Sally noted that she had a strong streak of independence which prompted her to pursue her nursing career, and which prompted her to go back to work so that her children would have a chance. She had a quirky sense of humour that saw her through rough times. She also had a desire for and an openness to knowledge which sometimes resulted in “a little door being opened.”

Sally’s understanding of her situation and her self-esteem seemed to increase in partnership. As she understood more about alcoholism, she began to realize that she was not to blame for her marital situation. Colleagues at work began to challenge world views that were already crumbling, and her new world view began to emerge. She began to believe that she was a competent and intelligent person, and that she could take more of her own needs into consideration. This new world view resulted in the defiance of her husband’s wishes, and eventually in a separation.

The death of Sally’s husband seemed to be a watershed in Sally’s life. Sally seemed to understand her early life and her marriage primarily in psychological terms. There was introspection of the self, and an attempt to understand why her life came to be lived in that
fashion. Little talk of what was important or meaningful was stated directly. Sally was stating in effect, “That is who I was, and how I understand my past identity.” This narrative was likely shaped to a certain degree by her involvement in Al-Anon which helped her to understand some of the dynamics both in her marriage and in her family of origin.

In understanding her life following her husband’s death, Sally seemed to move to a different and more spiritually-oriented narrative. She stated that she understood life in a new way now, and believed her view of life was on a different plane. This understanding of life included her belief that life was a journey. Each person had his/her own journey, and it was important not to intrude or attempt to redirect someone else’s journey. Sally’s own experience of domination seemed to have led her to a deep appreciation of respect for others. Sally also increased in self-respect, and came to believe that keeping herself safe was her most important job. This belief reflected a dramatic shift from her attitude earlier in her life.

At the end of her story Sally offered a life metaphor which was resonant in meaning for her. She was on a journey, but it was not one filled with striving. It involved simply letting go, and being open to experiences. It did not require sacrifice or hardship, nor did it require pleasing other people. It did involve being willing to float. The meaning came in the experiences which came into one’s life, and the simple pleasures of living out the journey. Her purpose in life was no longer to please other people, but to please herself, and to be true to her journey. It was in this sense that Sally’s story seemed to move from one which was centered in connectedness, to one that was transcendent. Sally described herself before and during the marriage as being very concerned with other people’s opinions and with maintaining relationships. Following her husband’s death, her meaning became transcendent of self, and of others, and had a distinctly spiritual quality.

Sally’s current meaning in life was rooted in her life attitudes. The abstract and spiritual quality of the narrative reflected the importance that beliefs and attitudes had for Sally’s sense of meaning. Personal moral values were also important to her, such as her respect for other people’s journeys. Objects of meaning were less important to Sally than they had been previously. She had never found much meaning in material goods, but at one time other people and their opinions were particularly important to her. Now Sally felt that
her meaning was more internal to herself, and was therefore less easily changed by circumstance or by other people. Thus, within the structure of meaning in life that I have proposed, Sally’s change in meaning in life can be seen as a shift from one which resided in objects of meaning to one which primarily resided in life attitudes.

**Comparison with the Theories**

Sally’s life story can also be understood from an existentialist perspective such as Yalom’s or Frankl’s. In just a little over a year, Sally’s husband committed suicide and her father was killed in a car accident. Sally encountered the existential given of death in a more personal manner than she had previously. She noted that her parents’ car accident caused her to reexamine her life and to make the change of separating from her husband. Following the death of her husband, she felt deeply resentful that her father who loved to live was killed, and her husband had chosen to squander the gift of life that had been taken from her father. It seemed that these two deaths placed Sally in some turmoil which eventually led her to a new way of understanding life.

Sally’s story had many of the characteristics that Frankl would associate with meaning in life. She had a belief in a cosmic meaning, she had developed a unique sense of meaning, and she had an ongoing sense of purpose. She stated her belief in a cosmic meaning quite clearly, “A lot of time things happen in our lives and we have no idea why they happen. And sometimes things happen to our lives and we don’t have an idea but we find out years later why. I also believe that there is a power stronger than myself who may be guiding me, or at any rate watching over me. I believe my journey is unfolding a story or is a step in some larger plan.”

To a certain extent Sally also had a unique sense of meaning in her life. She mentioned that although her husband’s suicide was very difficult to cope with, she was able to use her experience to help other people who had had someone close to them commit suicide. This meaning was not Sally’s only sense of meaning in life, but it did provide her with a sense of purpose. Sally also had an ongoing sense of meaning provided by her view of life as a journey. She believed that her purpose in life was to live and to be happy and to fulfill her journey as best as she could. She also had “gifts” which were important for her everyday
meaning: “The experiences that have confirmed my sense of meaning in life are very
difficult to define. They are always of a spiritual ‘mysterious’ nature. They usually come
through other people. I call them my gifts.”

In Sally’s life experience, much of her married life was spent in coping and surviving.
Yalom has suggested that until the needs for survival and safety are met, it is difficult for a
person to have enough mental or psychological reserves to consider meaning in life.
Although it seemed that Sally did have meaning in her life during her marriage (i.e., working
for the children’s freedom and her sense of humour), she did not have the leisure to explore
and to construct her own meaning in life until the present time. Thus theories which assume
a nurturing family of origin and satisfying intimate adult relationships have less to say about
Sally’s experiences and her resulting struggle to find meaning in her life.

These changes were also similar to Baumeister’s theory of change. Baumeister
proposed that in order to have meaning in life, one must have a sense of purpose, value,
efficacy, and self-worth. For many years, Sally’s self-worth was challenged by her husband’s
abusive behaviour. As her self-worth was built up at work, she was more able to see the
pattern of negative events in her marriage. At the same time, the maturation of her children
gave her more freedom to see the pattern. As her doubts crystallized, her parents’ car
accident provided the focal incident which instigated change. Sally was able to use this
incident to give her the courage to move and to begin to find meanings in life outside of her
marriage.

When McAdams’ criteria were applied to Sally’s story, it seemed that Sally maintained
coherence and openness in a unique manner. Sally sought for coherence for much of her life,
but it was not until the death of her husband and her subsequent involvement with Al-Anon
that she found a plot around which she could organize her narrative. The coherence of her
story seemed relatively new and seemed to apply primarily to her married years. The
openness in her story was constructed as increasing over time, and she now viewed herself as
being open to all events in her life. Coherence had been found and was useful in
understanding her early identity, but openness seemed to currently predominate. Sally’s
story seemed quite credible, except that I found it difficult to resonate with the expressed
transcendence of her later years. From a more detached standpoint, however, I found her story credible. Sally’s story was somewhat less differentiated than other participants’ stories. In adopting the Al-Anon perspective, there was some sacrifice to richness and intricacy. There was an element of generative integration, but it was in a more spiritual or transcendent sphere, rather than the concrete altruistic actions of Hannah and Zara.

5.5.5 Stability in Creativity and Activity

5.5.5.1 Norma’s Story

“I paint in the middle of the night when I can’t sleep. I just take out my watercolours in the kitchen, and make a cup of coffee and paint for a couple of hours. It’s good for my soul.”

I was one of a family of 5. Four brothers and myself. And I was the second youngest. My dad had a tremendous personality. He had patience galore, he was a hard worker, he was a very kind dedicated person, he loved all his family and he would do anything for us. He always was the last one to think of himself. He was very involved in community and church. I think we were all brought up to follow in his footsteps as closely as possible. I never did some things because I could see my dad’s face, and I’d think, if I did these things he would be disappointed in me, so I wouldn’t do them.

Mom was a very dedicated person to her work and her community and her family too, but she had five of us and a lot of work on the farm. She was quite musical too. I was really blessed with wonderful parents. But I guess Dad’s so special because I was the only girl and I was named after him. Mom was a great reader, she would read, read, read. Dad had never had a chance to go to school very much. He’d be tired from working and he would lie down after lunch, and Mom would sit and read to him. She read books and books, and books to my Dad, through the years.

As a girl with four brothers, I really had to fight my way along. I learned to play hockey and ball with the best of them. They were very good and very kind, but they thought I should be able to keep up to them. I remember we got a big high windmill at home, and it had a ladder up the front. The three older boys wanted to go up on it, but they were afraid to,
so they sent me up, and I was a little tad at that time. I was terrified. My dad came and rescued me. That was another reason I loved my dad so much, he always seemed to be rescuing me.

But we had a very nice childhood, all of us. Mom and Dad were great people. We had a big house on the farm, and we had all kinds of friends. There were always friends.

My dad loved to sing. We’d come home from church, when I was just a little wee kid, and he would say, come on, let’s have some music. He would sing and I would play, and somehow I learned to play. I play all the time and I can’t read a note. I either play the piano or the organ and I play constantly. I hardly go by the piano I don’t sit down and play. I never need any music. I can play all the old pieces that were popular in years coming up. It’s my own therapy. At night when I can’t sleep I either paint or play or write poetry. I like doing those kind of things.

I drew I guess from the time I could hold a pencil. We never had much material. I can remember way back when I was small, and we would get goldenrod, Mom always helped me with this, she was quite artistic too, in her own way. We boiled that up and got yellows, and I used blue ink, and red beet juice, and that gave me my three primary colours. I could make lots of pretty things with just that stuff. Not very durable, but that’s how I actually started.

I went to a country school for 10 grades and then went into high school for 11 and 12. Then I was too young to go to Teacher’s college, and I had to stay out a year, and I studied a few extra things then. My dad always had dreams for me. When I was a little wee kid, he used to say, when I got to be old enough he was going to send me to college to take music and art. But when it came time for me, it was the Depression, and I was lucky to get to Teacher’s College. I had to borrow a hundred bucks to pay the tuition from a cousin in Toronto because Dad just did not have the cash. It was very hard for Dad. You could just see it in his face. He would just get all choked up. He was pleased that I went through for a teacher, and he was so pleased when I started to do a lot of art because it sort of fulfilled his dream. And of course the music part. I used to play for my dad by the hour. It wasn’t hard for me to give up the dream because I never knew what I was missing, I guess. It was Dad’s dream.
We had such a great time at Teacher's College. I remember one friend whose dress I used to borrow. That dress went back and forth all winter. It was really kind of fun. We had so little and we had so much. We had such a good time. We made it ourselves, but it was good. There were four of us that came from four different areas of Saskatchewan that happened to get together in this one house, light housekeeping. That's 55 years, 57 years ago now, and we're still very close friends, the four of us.

I could have written "Why Shoot the Teacher" if Max Braithwaite hadn't written it first. Everything happened to me that happened to him. Mice in the basement. I got $500 for the year, and they took $200 off for board and room before it got there. So, I got $300 for that year, and I did the janitor work. I had 19 pupils in 11 grades. One set of Encyclopaedias with half the pages torn. It was just unbelievable, but I loved those kids. They had never had a teacher that stayed more than a year. No wonder. But I was determined to stay until they wanted me to stay. So I stayed another year and I really accomplished my objective because people did want me to stay, they just begged me to stay. It was kind of good for me. But I really really loved all those kids. And so many of them have become teachers and nurses and it makes you feel good.

While I was there, I played the piano for our little orchestra. We used to go all over the country and play for little dances and things. I played the piano. The next school I went to was a little village school, and I was there two years too. I played the piano for church, and I had a little choir. I really feel that any of the gifts that I have are gifts from God. I feel strongly about that. Because it's just natural for me to go over there and play the piano. There must be some reason that I'm able to.

Then I met my husband and I always tell him that I probably would have been teaching yet if I hadn't met him, but I did. I was home with another boyfriend, and he was home with one of my brothers. My mom had said to me, there's the nicest young fellow that comes home with your brother, just the kind of a fellow I wish you'd marry. She wasn't wrong. She was a pretty good judge of people I think, my mom. Anyway, it's been great. We have a happy wonderful marriage. My husband has a marvelous personality, and he is a very caring person. We have a warm relationship.
We didn’t have much money when we were married. My husband had a job, but it involved quite a bit of traveling. We had the two little girls before my husband got off the road. He did want to get off the road cause of the family. That wasn’t an easy part of our lives because he was away from Monday till the weekend. But, I did a lot of painting then too. I had a neighbour who loved to paint, and we’d go out in the backyard and get these big 4 X 8 sheets of cheap stuff. Saw it up with a breadsaw and paint in the afternoon. We’d make radish and onion sandwiches and put them in the fridge and the kids would play around and we’d paint and then we’d have a picnic. It wasn’t bad, but it was lonely. It was much nicer when my husband got off the road. He had an opportunity to buy into this little business, so he started up business for himself. He did very well.

As a couple we were very active in a local church. I’ve been extremely active through the years. I led a girl’s group there for about 5 or 6 years. I think there were 80 some girls in our group. We had a tremendous group. And we used to camp all over the place. Their motto was, “Love God and serve others thus with his help become the girl that God would have me be.” It just seemed to be a good philosophy of life. So I was involved with that, and saw our girls through it.

My faith is important to me. I believe there is a power in each one of us for good or evil. I find it hard to express just how I do feel. I think if you really want to live a Christian life, you go to church because there is a family of people there that feel the same as you do, or they wouldn’t be there. And there is a good fellowship. We have friends, very close friends, in the church, and always have. It’s sort of a way to recharge your batteries too. I mean if you feel kind of let down by the end of the week. I think you get support for what you do believe from the people that care in the same way you do. I just think if you believe in something, you’re going to support it. Otherwise why believe in it?

I don’t think my faith beliefs have changed over time. I think they were instilled in me from my mom and dad. As a child they sort of expected me to do certain things, and then as you get older you realize that these are the best things to do anyways. I don’t think I’ve had any experiences that shook my faith. When my oldest daughter and her first husband were divorced, it was a pretty grey time for me. We liked the boy so much, and it really was a
traumatic time. But I never, ever, felt bitter about it. I felt sad and sorry, everything I painted at that time was grey. Everything. And it was the strangest thing, I couldn’t get any colour into my work. I’d start out to do something and it would end up all greys. And I know it was because of the disappointment and the hurt. I think you hurt for your children, like my middle daughter, she’s been working 24 years, she’s not a teenager, and she just had surgery. I just couldn’t sleep and I felt so sad for her.

I had a very supportive, cooperative family. We sort of believe in cooperation right from the word go. We believe in the philosophy of it very strongly. It has been wonderful for me because the family always cooperated, and that allowed me to pursue courses in art. I took a summer school of the arts, and I taught art. I think if you really believe in cooperation, everything falls into place, because, if you have a desire to do something and the family cooperate with you, it’s much easier to accomplish it. Love and understanding all go hand-in-hand with it. If you’re sort of at loggerheads with each other, you can’t really accomplish a great deal. Together, you can do so much more than you can do individually.

I remember when we built our family cottage at the lake. We didn’t have any money. We had a friend who took a trailer in on a bad debt, and it was really filthy. He said to me, “If you want to clean up that trailer you can take it out to the lake for the summer if you can find a place for it.” I took him up on it, and I said, “Sure, I’ll clean it up.” So we cleaned it all up and painted it and found a lot out there to put it on for that summer. And we just loved it together as a family. The next summer the lake club said, “We’d like you to stay here, but in order to stay and keep that lot, you’ll have to build something on it.” Well, we didn’t have very many material things at that time. So we started to scrounge around, and we found lots of old railway ties, etc. We did it all ourselves and we built it right from the ground up. I love it because it’s so full of memories. When I look at the ceiling in the kitchen of our old cottage, I remember holding those boards up while my oldest daughter banged the nails in. She was only 10 years old. Our youngest daughter spent many summers there, and when she comes home now, that’s where she wants to spend time.

We talked a lot to the children. We always had a good relationship with each one. They knew we loved them no matter what they did. I think that’s important. My youngest
daughter once told me that she was thankful that we never ever made her feel sorry she was a girl. Of course we didn’t care, we were just happy to have a healthy baby.

People are important to me. I belong to a little bridge club and we’ve been together, the four of us have been together for 25 or 26 years. It’s the friendship more than the bridge.

I think kindness gives meaning to my life. Both other people’s kindness to me and my kindness to others. It’s a two-way street. It gives a person a lot of satisfaction to know that you can help someone or add to their happiness somehow. I really believe in helping others, as much as possible. Sometimes you can’t do as much as you’d like, but do what you can. I think that’s the important thing in life. Love thy neighbour as thyself. I think that’s what our purpose in being born is to share and care. I think sharing and caring are the two words that are very important. Because as you go through life, you’re born, and then you’re a young person, you go through different stages, and then when you get older you start to think back and think what has kept you strong through the years. ‘Cause there are times, tough times, when things are not easy. I think sharing and caring keep you going.

My art is very important to me. I never paint from photographs because I feel inhibited when I have to. I love the landscape work because I think our creation is so beautiful. I just love living here and looking out this window. It doesn’t matter what season of the year. I love winter because it’s so beautiful. The blue-shadowed snow. I paint in the middle of the night when I can’t sleep. I just take out my watercolours in the kitchen, and make a cup of coffee and paint for a couple of hours. It is good for me. It’s good for my soul. I either play the piano or the organ or paint or write poetry. I’m alone here, it’s quiet, there’s not a sound, and somehow it brings you closer to whatever you’re doing. Sometimes I’m lying in bed and I’m not sleeping, and I’m thinking prairie skies, and I’m thinking about all the beauty and the form and the colour in clouds. So then I quickly get up and I just get out there and I get some water, and a pad, and away I go. It just sort of frees you from the world. Just for awhile and then I realize I’m getting sleepy again, a bit, so I put it away.

I never look at a photograph and I never repeat. I never do the same painting. It would really bother me to do that. I have a lady now from Toronto who wants me to paint the bridge from our big window here, with the buildings behind. I really resisted that because I’d
have to use a ruler, and I'd have to be within lines. I'd feel stifled in some ways. I'd love to do the river and have it flowing and the trees.

When I'm painting I try to portray the feeling I got and the message I got when I looked at that scene. I feel a good piece of artwork should say something to you. A tree to me has to look like a tree, and not like a box. It would bother me to make a box and say, now there's a tree, but some people think they can get away with that. I think it's too gimmicky. It doesn't seem honest. It must be because lots of intelligent, honest people do it, but it's not for me. I really love landscapes, and I feel that they shouldn't be imitated, they should be interpreted.

It's real fun for me, and I can't quit. I would never paint for sale. Well, I never needed to, I guess. My husband says I never was hungry enough. I don't mind selling. If a person really wants some of my work and appreciates it, then I'll sell it to them for what it costs me to make it. But I've had a lot of friends who were artists and I loved their work until they started to paint for sale. And then it seemed to be so...I don't know...automatic? It didn't seem to be natural. Maybe it was natural, but to me it didn't seem to be. There's nothing wrong with it, if you feel good about doing it, but if you don't feel good about doing it then I don't think you should do it. I don't like to do anything I don't feel good about doing. For my own personal enjoyment and growth, I love to be creative and do my own thing. Some of my paintings are quite contemporary, a little bit abstract, because they're ideas, they're not really anything concrete. But they're not abstract, abstract. I think you can see things, everybody sees something differently in them. Which is the way it should be. Because I experience something that you aren't experiencing by looking at it. So, it's been quite a lifetime of art.

About the last ten years, I've started doing a lot of photography. I got into slides and because I love nature so much I really got into it. Like I take far more than I should. Then I started to get all these piles and piles of slides. So I started making travelogues and photo essays. Photo essays are about one thing. Like I've done one on snow, and one on trees, one on kids, one on dogs. The travelogues are somewhere where you've been. I like writing poetry so my script is usually in a poetic form. I use music as a background and I have these
already to go, I've shown them to all kinds of seniors' groups. So I'm sharing them with others, and, I enjoy sharing them, instead of sticking them away in boxes.

A few years ago I went to the British Isles on a university credit course. I stayed at an old estate that had been given over to a residential college, and I took art, history, and culture there. For a six-week course. It was a great experience. I've been very lucky to have been able to travel, we've traveled a tremendous amount.

Another highlight was our 50th wedding anniversary a couple of years ago. We had lots of friends, and all our family was home. But we're not as well as we used to be. My husband had surgery a few years back which really put him back a lot. It was quite serious. I'm not complaining though. You only have to look around you to see others much worse off. We've lost quite a few very close dear friends. Because of our ages I guess. We're getting up there to the stage where this is going to happen. But, I guess we're just grateful for each day. Live the best you can. 'Cause none of us know, do we? Age doesn't really matter.

As I grow older, I think maybe a little more about the importance of each day because time is so limited. I have a brother in a nursing home and I just feel so devastated when I go to see him because he's in pretty good condition but a lot of the people there, they're not really living. There's so many sad things around you, it makes you grateful we have some happy times too. But I strongly believe that if we didn't have problems we wouldn't be very good people. I think problems make us better people. I also believe that if we have problems and we seek help, we are sent strength to handle them. Now that may be God or a power that be or whatever a person wants to say, but, somehow we are sent the strength to handle what comes to us if we are receptive to it. If we are not receptive, then it's pretty hard to help somebody if they don't want to be helped. You just have to look at the birth of a baby, or out on the farm in the spring, the colts and the calves, and birth, and life in general. It's just a miracle.

I don't think about death more now. Unless I stop to talk about it with somebody. Not for myself. Although sometimes I think I should get my drawers cleaned out, little things
like that. The approach of death doesn’t change how I live my life. If you’re trying to live each day the best you can, you can’t do anymore, can you?

5.5.5.2 Comments on Norma’s Story

Connectedness and Object-focused Paths

Norma’s meaning in life was centered around the two themes of creativity, which I have labeled at a higher order as object-focused, and connectedness. They formed equally important sources of meaning in her life, and they also remained relatively stable throughout her life span. They both seemed to have developed at an early age in the context of a rich family life.

Norma described her family of origin as being warm and loving, and she had a particularly close relationship to her father. Norma was also close to her brothers, and she continued to enjoy a warm relationship with them. Her valuing of connectedness within her family was evident when she described their core value of cooperation, and told the wonderful story of her and her daughters building their summer cottage. The fellowship in her church was important to her, and she noted that they had developed many close friendships within that group. In almost every aspect of Norma’s life, relationships, friendships, and connectedness were present, and this source of meaning was stable over her life.

Norma’s creativity was fostered in her close relationship with her parents. Her father’s love of music and her mother’s nurturance of art ensured that Norma’s creativity would develop. When Norma’s husband was on the road, and the days were long, she found solace in painting in the backyard with a neighbour. Her creativity often found expression during moments of solitude, when her painting provided her with a form of therapy.

Faith

Norma’s faith beliefs were also important to her. She found it difficult to express their nature, but it seemed that many of the principles of the Christian faith were essential guiding principles in her life. In particular, she noted that she felt that sharing and caring were our purpose in life, and that kindness, both of and toward other people, gave her life meaning. There was a congruence between Norma’s beliefs and the activities she described herself
being involved in, thus her beliefs were not mere cognitions, but reflected part of her identity. Like connectedness and creativity, Norma’s faith beliefs remained constant over her lifespan.

Stability

When Norma’s meaning in life was considered from my structure of meaning in life, there was little indication of change. Her personal moral values, life attitudes, and objects of meaning remained relatively constant. Her life context has changed, but there have been few events in her life which have been unexpected. Only her daughter’s divorce caused her painting to change to grey for a time, suggesting a deep sadness, but not a change in meaning in life. Her meaning in life remained quite stable across her lifespan.

Comparison with the Theories

For this creative woman who highly valued connectedness, our theories offer little in way of illumination. Norma had not perceived any events in her life as an existential crisis. She did believe that she had a meaning in her life, which was similar to Frankl’s theory. Her path to meaning in life was a creative one, which Frankl mentioned in his theory. Baumeister’s theory provided some explanation of the lack of meaning crisis in her life. Because Norma had so many avenues of meaning, she had many possible sources of meaning should one fail. Transitions were thus minor and meanings could be sustained. Her perception of her meaning in life was not that of a process of change as outlined by Carlsen, but rather one of stability. Many of her life roles did change as suggested by Erikson, and the focus of her activities shifted in the predicted order of identity, intimacy, generativity, integrity. These shifts, however, did not capture her meaning as well as a focus on continuing creativity and connectedness. Fowler’s theory of faith was likely applicable to her faith development, but it seemed that Norma’s faith beliefs were not as central to her life meaning as would be suggested from Fowler’s theory. Given the lack of one central core source of meaning for Norma, it was difficult to understand her meaning further using Fowler’s theory.

McAdams’ imagoes or roles provided some understanding of Norma’s story. It was organized around her life roles of child/sister, mother, wife, artist, and friend. Her ordering of life events could be understood within this framework, and the events followed in a logical
fashion. Norma’s story was quite open, particularly with regard to art. I found it quite credible. The plot, characters, and themes were richly differentiated. Norma did not seem to have a strong need to reconcile life events because she perceived herself as having experienced few life events that were negative. Her story also contained strong elements of generative integration, in her desire to share her art and her music with other people.

5.5.5.3 Ginny’s Story

“The only experiences that were ever important to me were my church.”

The only experiences that were ever important to me were my church, in all of my younger years anyways, my whole life just centered entirely around the church. My parents were both totally involved in the church and so I just became totally involved in the church. We were in the Salvation Army and I was on the street with the open air services and in everything. At thirteen I was treasurer for the ladies’ sewing circle. I was the only teenager and it didn’t matter that everybody else in the group was over 50, that was how they kept me involved. They were always giving me things to do. In the Salvation Army the philosophy was to be ready to preach, pray, or die at a minute’s notice, so it was a case of walking into church every Sunday morning, “What are they going to ask me to do, what are they going to ask me to do today?” and I would, every week, be asked to lead the opening prayer, or lead the singing or sing a solo, just off the cuff.

I grew up in the mountains of British Columbia. My parents were the most loving people. They married at the age of 40, so it was like being raised by grandparents. My dad just worshipped my mother and I guess that is why when I got married it was such a shock when I got into a different situation where women were nothing but dirt under the feet of a man. I was never put down by my parents. Not by anybody that I can ever remember, people were always building me up. For example, I would feel that I was doing a terrible job when I would get up and sing in church. I’d think, oh I did such a terrible job, they’ll never ask me again, but they did. My self-esteem has always been low, but I can’t understand why. I guess my inferiority complex simply developed because I didn’t feel like I was the strong, good, or wonderful person that people thought I was. As a child growing up I knew what a
bad girl I was inside, but nobody ever saw what a bad girl I was on the outside. The bad girl inside was just what I was thinking and feeling, and nobody ever saw that. But then as I got older and began to develop a personal relationship with the Lord, he started working on that bad girl image of myself.

I was not content as a child. My father comes from a peasant, French-Canadian family, my mother from Royal Danish stock. Those two sides were always warring inside of me, growing up. I was always pulled to nature through my father and to the high class or high society because of my mother’s personality influences. That was always at war in me, until my own children came and I had other things to think about.

I never finished high school. Once I got through grade 8, as far as my parents were concerned, that was all the education that I needed. I was taking correspondence and by the time I finished helping my brothers with their school work I’d just head for the hills because I was more interested in being out in the hills than in books. My mom and dad didn’t think it was necessary for me to have more than grade 8, I was just going to get married and have kids. Being shy and a loner, I was quite happy out in the woods with my cat and my dogs.

When I was 13, I looked like 18. My clothes were the cast offs of a 35-year-old cousin because she changed her wardrobe every spring and every fall and just automatically sent her beautiful velvet and pure silk dresses to me. I wandered the mountains in silk and velvets and high heels. I would sit for hours when they were working on the highway, watching the men work, with my dog and half a dozen cats always around me. My parents didn’t have a clue where I was, I was just off in the hills. But I loved the smell of machinery. Once a young man must have said something and I heard this older man say, “Lay off, she’s just a kid.” It never registered at that time because I was just a dumb kid. But years later when it came back to my mind I thought the Lord was using the older man to protect me because no one ever made a pass at me. There was never anything said or done that made any impression on me as being a danger to me at all.

I was extremely shy and withdrawn when I was younger, I was a different person. I literally would turn beet red if even relatives spoke to me. Because of being so shy, I would never, ever, have done anything that anybody asked me to do if I thought that I could have
said, “No, I can’t do it.” But in the Salvation Army, they wouldn’t allow me to say no, I can’t do it, it was just sort of something that I had to do. So I was forced into doing things that I would never have done otherwise, and I see that now as part of the Lord’s training.

I was no longer shy and withdrawn after my first child was born. The thing that turned me around was that I was working in a newspaper office and the fashion editor was one of those stunningly beautiful, sophisticated types that I was absolutely terrified of. She heard that I had a little girl and so she came up to me one day and she said, “I hear you have a little girl.” I said, “Yes,” and of course I am just shaking in my boots and she said, “I would give anything if I could have a child,” and she started to cry. It was like a wall literally melted in front of me because I realized this woman that I’d been so afraid of was just as human as I was. It was like my tongue had been cut loose and I don’t think I’ve stopped talking since!

I got married, and it was a very unhappy relationship. I kept very busy in the church. My kids were in Sunday school and club activities, I was always in choir, I got into the ladies’ missionary fellowship, Cradle Roll, Pioneer Girls, every night of the week sort of a thing. At the time, I just felt that I was doing what the Lord had put in my hands to do. Looking back at it now, I feel that given some of the problems that I had in my life at that time, it was the Lord’s way of keeping me too busy to dwell on the problems. I suppose a psychiatrist would say that it was my way of escaping from reality. All through my children’s growing up, and it was every night, I’d give them their supper, put them to bed and I was off to the church for something every night. I would never do it again with young children, if I could go back. I really feel now, looking back, that was the way the Lord kept me sane.

Because I led a very sheltered life, I guess, I didn’t see everything that was wrong in our marriage and family. All I saw was what was affecting me, and so, I just got totally involved in my church and in my children’s activities. As they got older they’d get into music and club and skating, whatever they were interested in, I was in it with them. I was in that marriage for twenty-six years. Until my youngest graduated from high school. I never got angry as far as speaking out angrily with their father. I just quietly took what I had to take and buried myself a little more deeply in my own way.
I was psychologically forced to go to university. My husband wanted to go back to university to become a teacher, and it became important to him for me to get some education. So I started going back to night school. Eventually it became important to me because I was in this marriage, and I didn’t expect that I was ever going to be able to get out of it. I knew that unless I could upgrade my own education, I would be worse than dirt under his feet. So I started going back to night school and it was one of my night school teachers who happened to be on the admissions board for a university. He suggested that I apply to university. I sent my application away and then became absolutely terrified at the thought, so one Sunday afternoon after church I decided I was going to write a letter to the university, withdrawing my application. Well, I had never in my life had trouble writing a letter, something always comes to my fingers, I’m not thinking about it, it is there on the paper. I got “dear sir” and that was as far as I went. Nothing, not a word would come, and so I decided I’d better do some praying about it and the Lord kept turning me to a verse in the Psalms, “I will go in the strength of the Lord.” I argued and argued and argued for nearly an hour, and finally I got up and tore up the letter and just let it be. I did well on my exams, and I was accepted for university.

My kids were in their teens when I was going through university. I was in a lot of public things too because I never gave up any of my church activities all through university. I was still in the choir, I didn’t have leadership roles in the women’s group, but I always attended, I kept up my guiding in Pioneer Girls. Choir and Pioneer Girls were the two things during that period of time that really kept me going in university because my mind would be going and going and going on my studies and I would just feel overwhelmed, but then it was time to go to choir. I didn’t feel like going but by the time we started singing, I just felt wonderful again, and I could come home and be raring to go. That was nice.

I started writing, even my prayers, just before I went to university. I still write what happened through the day and I comment on what happens through the day and then I literally talk to my heavenly father for however many pages I feel like talking about what has been bothering me and so on. That’s very important to me.
Things became worse in the marriage. He was literally telling the children that there was no such thing as God. They were teenagers and old enough by then that they weren’t paying too much attention to what he was saying, fortunately. While he was telling them this, I was in the other room praying for my children. At one point I just had the sense in myself that a door had slammed shut and the marriage was over. We had been talking about the problem that was becoming obvious, and he had grit his teeth and glared at me, “God nor no man will ever change me.” And that was a specific point when the door slammed shut and I knew that there was no hope and I wasn’t going to put up with it anymore. But as far as the church went, they couldn’t accept the fact that I was leaving, being male authority figures, they felt that even though they could understand why I felt I had to leave, they felt that they had the authority to order me to stay, regardless. I just said, “I’m sorry, I can’t, I won’t.” The day they asked me to leave the choir, I left the church.

My son and I did find another church home. It was a very warm, very loving ministry that we enjoyed. I have had friends who have come through similar experiences to mine, who have been totally turned off by the church because of the church’s attitude towards them. When I first moved to Saskatchewan after my divorce, I got into an Alliance church to start with and was in the choir. I made the mistake of applying for a transferred membership. Because my husband was totally accepted at the church, they believed everything he said, including several lies that he had come up with to justify himself in their eyes and so the report that they sent to my new church was sort of not good. I was informed that they wouldn’t be able to grant me membership, and that they would like me to step out of the choir. Well, that hurt, but I thought that’s fine, and then one Saturday I was really praying and I said, “Father, I have to belong somewhere,” because unless I was doing something in a church at that time, I didn’t feel that I belonged. I don’t feel that way anymore but I felt that very strongly. The next morning one of the elders came up to me with a key to the kitchen and asked me if I would take over the custodianship of the kitchen. I just about hugged him. Well surely they can’t say anything about this, I mean custodian of the kitchen is hardly a public ministry. That Wednesday I received a letter from the pastor, asking me to return the key. Then I left the church.
There was one point then where the thought crossed my mind for a few minutes, "So what does anybody care, why not just go the same route as all of my friends who had been in the same situation, and hit the bars, just forget the whole business." I took one very short look at that picture and said, "Father, I don't want it, thank you." It was not even a temptation. It was just no possibility me going that route. Unfortunately I watched some of my friends that have gone that route and it breaks my heart but I keep writing them and encouraging them to turn to the Lord. I said, "He still loves you," but I feel that some churches are going to have a great deal to answer for, in not being able to give the emotional support that women need when they are forced into leaving a bad marriage.

My faith in God never changed, it was just strengthened. It has just been a gradual process of strengthening my dependence on the Lord. When I left my husband, and I came out here, I had no family, nothing. I used to sit down sometimes and take a look at my life as though I was sitting on the outside looking at somebody else's life and I can remember thinking, "Boy if I didn't have the Lord, I wouldn't have anything." I didn't have money, I didn't have anything, and yet I never felt alone. An older German couple adopted me when I first came out here. She could never understand, because I didn't have a TV, I didn't have a radio, I didn't have a stereo, and she said, "How can you stand to be alone and quiet, so quiet, and there is nothing to listen to even." I said, "I don't need it." I felt peaceful and content.

I no longer do things just to keep my sanity. The things that I do now that keep me busy, I do because I enjoy doing them. Everything I do, whether it is in the church or out of the church I do it now because I feel it is something that the Lord has put in my hand to do and I just simply count on him to give me the strength to do the best job that I can with whatever it is. Most of my work is outside of the church now, being with seniors, and it's sometimes very emotionally demanding. I depend on the Lord for help with that.

I'm involved in organizing activities so that seniors can stay active. The German woman who befriended me was very much like my own mother in her personality. She wants people around her all the time and so of course every time I'd be in the city, she would say, "Why don't you phone? You are too busy to come and visit me, why can't you make more time to come and visit me?" One day I said, "Well I can't get over to see you as much
as I would like to because I am trying to keep other seniors from getting into the position that you are in, sitting there, feeling sorry for yourself all the time.” So I told her about some of the options that she had for activities, and encouraged her to try some of them out.

My relationship with the Lord has changed in that I have become so totally dependent on the Lord, in everything and for everything that I guess that is what keeps me from being afraid to try something new. Some of the jobs that I get, I mean they absolutely scare the daylights out of me, when I have to get on a panel discussion with the parks and recreation, and there are hundreds of these young Parks and Recreation people from all over the province, sitting out there, I mean in the natural I would be absolutely petrified. Yet because it is something that I feel the Lord gives me to do, I do it. This has been my ministry, educating the younger people who do work with seniors, but are trying to sort of slot seniors into specific categories. I try to educate them into realizing that seniors don’t all fit into those particular categories. I am dependent on the Lord just for wisdom and strength. Physical strength because I don’t have very much physical strength at all. There are times when I feel physically so weak that I feel I should be going to bed. But Lord, if you want me to do this job, you will give me the strength, and he does, he gives me the strength for the day.

The Lord is the only meaning and the only purpose in my life, period. Because, if it wasn’t for my relationship with the Lord, I wouldn’t be smiling right now because the situation with my kids is not good. I feel like I have been a total failure with two of my own children. I realized in talking to one of them that my kids don’t even know me at all. I’ve got friends that know me a lot better than my own children do. I still haven’t figured out what they expect from me. I really haven’t figured it out. So I don’t know how people survive without the Lord, I really don’t. Because I know I couldn’t. I know I’ve got a few friends that think that I am strong and stubborn. But inside I still feel insecure and inferior sometimes.

I think it’s important to stay positive. There is so much negative stuff going on in the world now, and I think we all have a tendency to be very easily discouraged by it. It’s important to try and keep your mind settled on things that are good and clean and positive because there is just so much filth around.
As I get older I think that the only changes that I am seeing are that I am becoming less and less afraid to confront things. Especially working with seniors issues’ and the government, I run into this a lot. I’m getting so that I don’t even think twice, it just sort of comes almost instinctively now to confront when something comes up. My views haven’t changed, but my willingness to express them is getting more pronounced. As I get older, I am becoming more concerned about issues that affect the seniors, within governments and in the judicial system.

Lately I’ve been thinking about my childhood more and remembering some of the good things, that I’d forgotten. Like about how loving my parents were. I was listening to a song the other day, and the words were, “I thank the good Lord above, for a home that was filled with love and a mamma and papa who gave me a chance to be raised that way.” I was sitting down there sewing and I started crying, “Father, thank you for reminding me.” I think that sometimes we need to remember.

I don’t think about death more than I used to. I’ve always had a very different attitude towards death than most people around me. My mother was very disturbed with my attitude towards death when my father died. It really, really troubled her, because I couldn’t mourn. I miss my father, I always missed him, I miss him more now than when he went, nearly 30 years ago. But I tried to make her understand that I couldn’t mourn for his going because the last six months of his life, he lived with the glow of heaven on him. Every time he talked to me it was, “I just can’t wait until I am with the Lord.” How could I mourn him going when I knew that he had gone to be with the Lord where he wanted to be? My attitude toward death is the same as my father’s. When it’s the Lord’s time for me to go, I’ll go as fast as I can. I have no fear of death.

5.5.5.4 Comments on Ginny’s Story

Object-focused

The meaning which Ginny found in her life rested upon her relationship with the Lord and her activities. Everything in her life, including her activities, was understood through her framework of her Christian faith, and in particular her very personal relationship with the
Lord. Her Christian faith was not an attitude or a belief, and did not seem to be centrally based on theological truths which could be doubted or questioned, or overturned. It was instead a relationship, and the most important relationship in her life. It was tested by an abusive marital relationship, by unloving church congregations, and by difficult relationships with two of her children. Ginny’s relationship to the Lord remained steadfast, and was changed only by it becoming deepened and strengthened. Instead of her faith being shaken by her experiences, she chose to mold her experiences to fit the faith to which she held true. All the events in Ginny’s life were seen as the Lord’s hand in her life, at least in retrospect.

Given the centrality of Ginny’s faith experience, it may seem unusual to call her path to meaning object-focused. When Ginny’s story was examined, however, there seemed to be little discussion of spiritual beliefs, or of transcendent statements. The expression of her faith remained largely rooted in concrete activities, which I have labeled as object-focused. She seemed to have enjoyed activities from an early age, and continued to be active as a lobbyist for seniors. At times these activities have served as retreats from difficult life situations, and at other times they were part of Ginny’s work to do for the Lord. Ginny provided us with little information beyond that as to the importance of activities for her, but they certainly were a central aspect of her meaning in life.

**Stability with Strengthening**

From my perspective, Ginny’s early faith and world view seemed to be insufficient to encompass some of the circumstances in which she found herself. When this occurred, Ginny could have made faith changes, but instead she seemed to choose to deny the contradictions, and to avoid the intellectual and emotional conflict. She did this by burying herself in activities. When she found herself in an abusive relationship, which was possibly damaging to her children, she avoided the situation by busying herself with church activities every night of the week. As the marriage worsened, she began university and went full-time, summers included. By denying or avoiding conflicts, Ginny’s faith and her meaning in life seemed to be prohibited from increasing in complexity. Her faith was instead required to remain at the same level of intellectual understanding it had previously been.
In contrast, Ginny’s perception was that her faith was deepened and strengthened by her experiences. By clinging to her faith, despite difficult circumstances, her emotional dependence on the Lord increased, and her relationship with the Lord grew in a dimension which was difficult to delineate.

Fowler’s theory, which focused on the cognitive aspects of faith development, would tend to support the first interpretation. When Ginny’s faith was looked at from Fowler’s perspective, there were few indicators of growth in Ginny’s intellectual understanding of her faith. It seemed that Ginny’s faith was at the individuative-reflective stage. She had considered her faith, had conflict with religious authority figures, and had freely adopted her faith. The next stage, which involved the “embrace of polarities,” did not seem to capture Ginny’s current faith perspective. From this perspective, it was difficult to understand the strengthening and deepening of faith which Ginny experienced. Mary Ford-Grabowsky (1987), however, noted that Fowler focused on the cognitive understanding of faith, to the neglect of the development of the inner self or the Christian self. She argued that development of the virtue of fortitude or endurance in one’s Christian commitment was an example of growth which was neglected in Fowler’s theory. Ginny’s experience of being rejected by two churches, and yet holding on to her faith, and continuing to seek another church, pointed to the fortitude and persistence that she was developing in her faith. Seen from this perspective, Ginny’s experience of deepening and strengthening in her faith became clearer.

Ginny identified psychological rather than meaning in life changes. Her feelings of inferiority seemed to have gradually diminished over her lifespan, particularly after she went to university and after she left her abusive husband. She noted a dramatic lessening in her shyness after her encounter with a fashion editor. She also identified a significant change point in her first marriage, when she realized that her husband was not going to change. This event provided the impetus she needed to prepare to leave. Ginny’s identified changes in her life were thus primarily psychological rather than concerned with meaning in life.

When Ginny’s meaning in life was considered from the meaning in life framework that I have proposed, there seemed to have been little change. Activities, which were a central
object of meaning, have changed in their content, but not in their importance. She continued to find many worthwhile projects in which to be involved. Her relationship with her Lord was a second central object of meaning, and as was previously mentioned, it had been strengthened and deepened, but had not shifted in a way that Ginny would label as a change, "My faith in God never changed, it was just strengthened."

Comparison with the Theories

It seemed apparent that the existentialist theories have little interpretive power in Ginny's story. Likewise the increased wisdom, transcendence, and integrity of Carlsen's theory were not readily apparent. Ginny's life story roughly followed the changing in roles suggested by Erikson, but I did not find a convergent shift in meaning in life. As was previously mentioned, the centrality of the Lord to Ginny's story was resonant with Fowler's theory of the stages of faith. There were also aspects of Ginny's faith, such as her fortitude, which were not reflected in Fowler's theory, which may provide more interpretive power in Ginny's faith and the meaning which it gave to her life.

Baumeister's theory illuminated Ginny's difficulty in leaving her first marriage. Ginny stated that she became very active, partly to avoid the negative aspects of her first marriage. Eventually she was free to see the negative pattern of her marriage. This freedom seemed to have been the product of both increased self-worth, through education, and the maturation of her children. When her discontent was recognized, she left the marriage, despite considerable opposition.

When viewed from McAdams' perspective, Ginny's story was coherent in its organization around her relationship with her Lord, but it lacked some coherence in the understanding of self. For example, she saw herself as being inferior, yet she noted in a puzzled fashion that her parents never put her down, and most of her friends perceived her as being confident and self-assured. Ginny's story was relatively closed because it was housed within the framework of her view of her Christian faith. It seemed fairly credible, although I too questioned Ginny's belief that she struggled with an inferiority complex or with confrontation. My perception in the interview was that she was self-confident, and enjoyed confrontation. Ginny's story was quite differentiated in plot, and contained many twists and
turns. The characters and themes seemed less complex. Ginny searched for reconciliation within the bounds of her perception of Christianity. Certain aspects of her story could only be reconciled within her Christian faith, such as understanding how life events were ordered. Other life events were reconciled through psychological constructs, such as her inferiority complex. Ginny's story contained an active generative integration, in her desire to promote the causes of seniors.

5.5.5.5 Comments on Norma and Ginny's Meaning in Life

Norma and Ginny's faith was an element of their meanings in life, which was reflected in the reviewed theories (i.e., Fowler). The continued importance which Norma placed on connectedness, however, was not well captured by the theories, as was previously discussed in the summary of Mary's, Clara's, and Eleanor's stories. A second aspect of meaning which was not well captured by the theories was the meaning the object-focused path, as exemplified in creativity and activity, provided to these women. In general the reviewed theories of meaning in life emphasized cognitions and attitudes. The object-focused path, which included experiences, activities, and creativity, was relatively neglected. An exception was Frankl, who stated that there were three paths to meaning in life which were the creative, the experiential, and the attitudinal. Given the meanings which Norma and Ginny found in their lives, further exploration of the creative and the experiential forms of meaning in life in our theories would likely be rewarding in terms of enriching our understanding of meaning in life.
6. Discussion

6.1 Summary of Findings

There are four key findings which can be taken from the women’s life stories. The first finding is that connectedness is a theme and a path to meaning which has been neglected by our theories of meaning in life. For most of the women in this study, maintaining connectedness was a key component of their meaning in life. Relationships with their spouses, children, and extended family were a central part of their narratives. Norma’s narrative displayed this emphasis on familial ties, and was exemplary in the singularly positive manner with which she described those relationships and the reciprocity which seemed to be inherent in them. Clara’s narrative reflected the ambivalence which sometimes accompanies placing strong value on connectedness and being unsure if that valuing is returned. Friendships were another important element of connectedness, as was portrayed in Mary’s story of the weekly coffee party in which conversation was the thread which wove them together. The longevity and rootedness of Mary’s friendships was another aspect of connectedness that was illustrated in her narrative. Eleanor’s narrative told of the importance of relationships in friendships, in family, but also in community. Her connectedness to her neighbours in the towns in which she lived, to her fellow parishioners in her church, and then with staff in her nursing home, spoke to the importance of relationships within a community. In totality these women’s narratives spoke at length of connectedness and relationships and their importance for having meaning in life.

The second finding is that meaning in life is comprised not only of our values or life attitudes, but often of concrete objects. In many of our current theories, and in my own assumptions about meaning in life, there is an emphasis on the cognitive or the attitudinal. The interviews with these women, however, contain many references to concrete objects of meaning, which are obviously central to their meaning in life. The objects of meaning are significant in that many of them contain references to experiential pleasures (e.g., music), or to emotional connections (e.g., children) that might be lost if they were translated into more cognitive values or life attitudes. Preserving the concreteness of the objects of meaning.
encourages an exploration of the experiential and the affective aspects of meaning in life. This preservation was key to my own contemplation of “doing” or “feeling” as modalities of meaning that were separate from a “thinking” modality. Overall our theories may have more relevance to an individual whose meaning is attitudinal, who thinks more abstractly, and who is more open to experience. These women’s narratives suggest that we need to explore other aspects of meaning, including meaning in life derived from concrete objects and common experiences.

The third finding is that it is important to recognize the embeddedness of meaning in the life context. Most theories of change do recognize the importance of the life context, but while I was conducting the research project, it struck me anew how important the life context is. It was very difficult to accurately describe the objects of meaning, personal moral values, life attitudes, affect, and change of a woman’s meaning in life, unless significant life context was supplied. It left me with some reservations as to how a survey instrument designed to measure meaning in life would even begin to capture the richness of the construct in an individual’s life.

The fourth finding is that understanding change in a person’s meaning requires being aware of the many components of her/his meaning in life, and then understanding at what level change is occurring. Change which occurs within the component of personal moral values may not have the same significance as change which occurs in the paths to meaning. Understanding where the change occurs assists in determining the significance of the change for the individual. It may highlight why a change which is difficult for one individual may be natural for another individual. The description of the change process can be found in Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2.

6.2 The Structure of Meaning in Life: The Stories & the Theories.

In the literature review, the structures of meaning in life were reviewed and were summarized as being primarily three-dimensional models that referred to an individual’s beliefs in some type of order or coherence in the world, having a sense of one’s own purpose or meaning within that world, and having a sense of fulfillment. In this section I will review
some of the similarities and some of the differences between this study's model of meaning in life and the models reviewed from the literature.

The key similarity between the emergent structure of meaning in life and the models found in the literature is a recognition of the importance of our beliefs about the world. This study captures those beliefs in the categories of personal moral values and life attitudes. In the models reviewed from the literature, most used an all-encompassing sense of order (or framework, sense, coherence). One of the assumptions of the models was that one would consciously integrate one's beliefs into a coherent whole. This study was more resonant with Baumeister's (1991) theory. Baumeister stated that there were a variety of meanings of life, and that individuals frequently did not reconcile contradictory beliefs with each other. This seemed to be the case for most of this study's participants. An interesting comment that Zara made was, "What is this purpose? I have no purpose." When I inquired further about Zara's understanding of purpose, she noted that she associated a sense of mission, or an overarching goal, accompanied by missionary zeal, with the word "purpose." She felt that her life had no such purpose. Many of the other women in the study had similar reservations about the implications of having a purpose in life, yet it was my impression that all of the women had some degree of meaning in their lives, and most of them had significant meaning. It may be important to consider that purpose, with its connotation of directing most of one's energy toward a single goal, may be a construct that is not applicable for a portion of our society, particularly as we move toward an increasingly pluralistic society.

A second similarity is that this study recognizes the importance of affect, although the role of affect remains exploratory in this study. Reker and Wong (1988) and Battista and Almond (1973) stated that the fulfillment of personal meaning would usually be accompanied by positive affect. The exploratory nature of the investigation into affect precludes being definitive, but affect may be a marker of changes in meaning in life. This is further discussed in Section 6.3.1.

One key difference is that life context was explicitly recognized in this study. Because many of the models have been based on survey information, there is often little room to acknowledge the importance of life context. It is, however, important to recognize that
meaning in life does not occur in a vacuum, and if the life context is not acknowledged, then
the significance of certain events may be lost.

A second difference is that this study included experiential aspects of meaning in life,
both in objects of meaning and in the paths to meaning. Previous models of meaning in life
have focused heavily on the beliefs which make up the personal meaning, and have neglected
experiential aspects. For example, Reker and Wong’s emphasis on the cognitive, and the
roles which they assigned to affect and motivation, mean that the experienced objects of
meaning and the experiential and creative paths to meaning in life may not be readily
captured by their instrument. For example, a woman such as Mary, who is fairly concrete,
and who highly values connectedness, may not endorse “I have a mission in life that gives
me a sense of direction,” or “I have a philosophy of life that gives my existence significance”
(Reker, 1992). There is, however, meaning in her life, and it is that experience of meaning
which may be lost in the Life Attitude Profile - Revised and in similar survey instruments.

6.3 The Process of Change: The Stories & the Theories.

6.3.1 Where does change occur?

When I was reviewing the women’s stories, it struck me that change seemed to occur
on two levels. The first type of change occurred within the category of an object of meaning,
personal moral value, or life attitude. The second type of change might be instigated by a
change within one of these categories, but because of a variety of factors, it resulted in a
change in the path to meaning (connectedness, altruism, individualism, object-focused, or
transcendent). These changes in the path to meaning were the changes that seemed to signify
the most growth and the most anguish. I discuss changes within each of the categories, and
then consider them in relation to changes in the paths to meaning.

For some of the participants, change occurred within the objects of meaning. People or
things which were of importance were removed from or added to their lives. In some
instances the place of the objects of meaning could be filled by other objects of meaning. For
example, when Mary’s husband died, she missed him very much, but she had a network of
family and friends whose presence served to fill some of the void left by her husband. For
other participants, the objects of meaning were less malleable. Clara’s rural existence was centered around the person of her husband, and when he died a large void in meaning was left.

Changes within personal moral values were relatively rare in this group of women. It seemed that generally the values which they had been taught by their parents were the values that they carried with them. Some examples of stability are Norma’s belief in cooperation and Hannah’s belief in respect. Zara is an example of a change in personal moral values. She noted that after she witnessed the partitioning of India, she no longer practised the rituals of her religion. Some of her values within her faith no longer seemed essential, and they were altered. Eleanor also noted that her values had changed after her second conversion experience. For her this change in values represented a significant change in her meaning in life.

Changes within life attitudes seem to be the type of change the reviewed theories of meaning in life discuss most often. The existentialists (including Frankl), Fowler, and Carlsen all seem to be discussing changes in life attitudes or in world views when they refer to change in meaning in life. The existentialists refer to challenges to one’s world view, Fowler discusses changes in one’s ultimate reality or cognitive perspective, and Carlsen refers to changes in wisdom, generativity, and integrity. In this study, only Sally perceived there to have been significant changes in her life attitudes. An example is that prior to her husband’s suicide a large part of her meaning had been in caring for others. Following his suicide, she began to believe that she needed to care for herself.

Changes within the affective component of meaning in life were difficult to trace because most participants made few direct references to their emotions. The appendix for each woman’s story has a section containing the quotations referring to affect. There were some noteworthy exceptions. Eleanor experienced being lifted to heights of joy by her conversion experience, and then becoming depressed again the following day. Clara felt deep sadness following the death of her husband, and had difficulty in finding joy in other avenues of meaning. Sally seemed to have stress and anxiety during much of her marriage, and following her husband’s death she gradually began to experience peace. I expected that
affect might be a marker of significant shifts in meaning in life. These women's experiences suggest that may indeed be the case. Another element of affect, which was not analyzed, was the overall affective shading or tone of the first-person accounts. By reading between-the-lines it is possible to discern glimpses of the women’s emotional make-up, and emotional responsiveness. I chose not to analyze the women’s affective experiences from this perspective, because it seemed to move outside of their experiences, and into a distant analytical perspective. In future research, however, it might be interesting to consider how a person’s emotional make-up interacts with meaning-making.

Change can occur in each of these categories, but change can also occur at the level of one’s path to meaning. In Clara’s life, the death of her husband was not simply the loss of an object of meaning, but it also forced her to search for a new path to meaning. Prior to the death of her husband, she had found meaning in her connectedness to him, in her farm work, and in volunteering in rural organizations, thus her paths to meaning were connectedness and object-focused. When he died, and she moved in to the city, there was a disruption in both of her paths to meaning. She was cut off from other sources of connectedness (her rural network of friends), and she was cut off from her meaningful activities (e.g., driving the combine). She tried to assume a new path to meaning via individualism in the city, but she has found it difficult and un.rewarding. It is interesting to note, however, that Clara’s personal moral values and life attitudes have not changed. Without an examination of her objects of meaning and her paths to meaning, the changes in her meaning in life could be neglected.

It seems likely that if an individual has two or even three paths to meaning, transition from one to another would be easier than if one had a central path to meaning. Norma’s narrative exemplifies a balance between the paths of object-focused (in the form of creativity) and connectedness. If for some reason her path to creativity was removed (e.g., loss of the use of her hands), she would still be able to find meaning in her connectedness with other people. The transition would be difficult, but likely not as painful as if she had focused entirely on the creative path to meaning.
6.3.2 Why does change occur?

Changes in these women’s meaning in life seemed to emerge from a combination of four factors: insufficient meaning in life framework; challenging life events; abstract cognitive style; and in openness to experience. Sally’s early meaning in life framework was not sufficient to encompass her life experiences. Her early framework included an acceptance of her husband’s controlling behaviours as part of a marriage. Sally soon began to have doubts about her acceptance of his behaviour. When work colleagues challenged this framework, Sally seemed to receive the confirmation she needed of its inadequacy, and she created a new framework, which included personal freedom. For some of the other participants, their meaning in life framework was sufficient to encompass most life events that they encountered, which resulted in little change in meaning in life. Hannah seemed to have a remarkably pluralistic and pragmatic framework for most of her life, thus it was not difficult for her to place her husband’s death or her overseas experiences within that framework without significant changes to it.

Some women encountered life events that were more challenging to their meaning in life than other women. Zara witnessed the partitioning of India, the deaths of hundreds, and was placed in a refugee camp. Her meaning in life was challenged by this life event, and this challenge seems almost expected. By contrast Mary’s life was comparatively free of tragedy, and it contained few events that were directly challenging to her meaning in life.

Some women’s cognitive style also seemed to promote change. Zara’s cognitive style was to question every aspect of her life, and to think in relatively abstract and intellectual ways that led her to examine and explore every aspect of her meaning in life. This disposition to engage in abstract thought allowed her to question some assumptions that she would not have been able to if her cognitive style was more concrete. Mary was more concrete in her cognitive style, and she had rarely considered or questioned her life attitudes or values. Some women, such as Hannah or Norma, were more abstract in their cognitive style, but their focus was activity-oriented or experiential rather than intellectual. They tended not to question their meaning in life, and this led to stability.
Ginny was a woman who seemed to have an insufficient framework of meaning in life, to whom traumatic life events occurred, and whose cognitive style was relatively abstract and intellectual. Her meaning in life, however, remained stable, and that stability may be understood by the personality factor of openness to experience (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Ginny seemed to be rather closed to experiences, and did not seek out experiences that would be challenging to her meaning in life. Ginny’s religious background seemed to further foster a belief that she should not question her faith or her meaning in life. This background allowed for the development of fortitude within the Christian faith, but it did not foster attitudinal/belief changes. Ginny seemed sometimes to close her eyes to events or information that would threaten her meaning in life, thus openness to experience becomes a key element in understanding changes in meaning in life.

6.3.3 Yalom, Bugental, May

There were two women in this study who perceived their changes in meaning in life in a manner that was congruent with existentialist theories of change, and they were Sally and Eleanor. Eleanor’s narrative, which contained a dramatic conversion experience, is examined in conjunction with Frankl’s theory. Sally’s narrative is discussed here as it is the most resonant with the existentialist perspective on change, as represented by Yalom, Bugental, and May’s writings.

Sally’s narrative contained two life events that she suggested as being key events in challenging her world view. A car accident killed her father (who loved life) and seriously injured her mother. She stated that this event somehow “gave her the energy to move.” It caused her to reexamine the suffering that she was experiencing in her marriage, and compelled her to force a change. The subsequent suicide of her husband magnified this change. She no longer had to change only her living situation, but she also needed to change her way of making sense of the world. Her new sense of order was partially shaped by Al-Anon, but was also shaped by her reading and internalization of material that was spiritual in nature. She described her new way of understanding her life as a journey as being on a different plane from her previous existence.
Sally’s narrative is an example of confronting the existential given of death and becoming aware of the realities of her existence. This included becoming aware of the suffering she experienced in her marriage and her own mortality. These life events did lead to a dismantling of her previous belief system and the creation of a new belief system which was more authentic. It allowed her to live her life fully in the face of the existential given of death. It also led to a deeper sense of peace than she had previously experienced.

Zara’s process of change in her meaning in life could also be considered an example of an existential crisis, although to a somewhat less extent. Zara’s experience of the partitioning of India led her to challenge her faith, and to subsequently cut out the “rituals and frills” associated with her religion, and to keep the ethics. It was a life event that forced her to confront the existential reality of death. She subsequently made a change in her belief system, in a manner that could be considered to be more authentic. I do not have a sense of increased peace or contentment from Zara’s narrative. Yalom, in particular, felt that an individual who became more authentic would have fewer neurotic symptoms. Zara, however, continued to wrestle with contradictions, to search for challenging experiences, and remained open to change throughout her lifespan. Rather than a one-time change experience, Zara’s meaning in life seems to follow a path of successive changes.

Ginny’s experience of an abusive marriage, and Clara’s and Hannah’s experiences of the deaths of their husbands, could also be considered examples of existential crises. These women, however, did not experience those events in the same manner that Sally or Zara did. Ginny chose to incorporate her experiences within an existing religious framework and to grow within that framework, rather than expanding outside of it. Clara did not perceive her life framework to have been challenged, but missed her husband at an experiential level. This focus on the experiential precluded an existential (attitudinal) crisis. Hannah’s worldview, which was pragmatic and pluralistic, already allowed her to incorporate her husband’s death, and thus it caused little existential examination.

From a comparison of these women’s narratives, it would seem that the existentialist perspective may be most useful in understanding women’s meaning in life that is focused on the attitudinal rather than the experiential. If order or coherence is not perceived as
important, or if the attitudinal rarely intersects with the experienced life event, then existential crises may not be perceived or experienced. Existential change also requires some openness to experience, and a willingness to have one’s beliefs challenged. If one feels, as did Ginny, that one grows by changing oneself to accommodate one’s beliefs, then existential crises may be unusual. In addition, if one’s framework is already sufficient to accommodate existential realities, such as Hannah’s pragmatism and thankfulness, then existential crises seem less likely to occur.

6.3.4 Frankl

Frankl’s theory is resonant with Eleanor’s narrative. Eleanor endured a fair amount of suffering in her life, and likely struggled with some despair. Her encounter with a Baptist church in a small Saskatchewan town caused her to confront her previous belief systems, and possibly some feelings of guilt. This confrontation led to a conversion experience which was a dramatic change point for her. It raised her to the heights of joy, and it gave her a sense of purpose in telling other people about Jesus. Her despair did return, but through the support of other church members, and her persistence in her faith, she was gradually able to experience more happiness in her daily life. In Eleanor’s life experiences, the features of Frankl’s theory are evident. Her involvement in the Baptist church led her to examine the universal given of guilt, and her polio had led to an ongoing experience of pain in her life. Her conversion experience gave her a sense of cosmic meaning, and a sense of her own unique meaning, which was to tell others about Jesus. As Eleanor struggled to place her life under God’s will, there is a sense of a movement toward self-transcendence.

Frankl’s theory seems particularly appropriate for Eleanor’s story because of its emphasis on cosmic meaning, unique meaning, and the dramatic change process. It has less resonance for individuals who do not have religious/spiritual beliefs, whose change process is more gradual, and for those individuals who believe meaning is created and terrestrial, rather than discovered and cosmic.

Frankl’s theory, like Yalom’s, focuses on the cognitive/attitudinal aspects of change. It does recognize the creative and experiential aspects of meaning, however, in Frankl’s “paths
to meaning.” The process of change, however, is viewed more within the attitudinal “path to meaning” than in the experiential “paths to meaning.” For example, when Frankl discusses discovering meaning, it is usually in the context of an attitudinal shift, rather than exploring a new aspect of the experiential or creative “paths to meaning.” From my exploration of these women’s narratives, there is room to further explore the change process within the experiential and creative “paths to meaning.”

6.3.5 Erikson

It was suggested in the introduction that Erikson’s theory of development could be seen as reflecting the changes in meaning in life that occur in conjunction with major changes in life roles. The stories of Mary, Hannah, and Clara reflect some of the changes in life meaning that co-occur with changes in life roles. They also illuminate some interesting exceptions.

Mary’s narrative reflected the importance of generativity. She said little about the early years of her marriage, but it seems quite possible that they were focused on intimacy. The central focus of Mary’s narrative, however, was on caring for her children, being a good mother, and being a good neighbour. There were a couple of changes in life roles following the birth of her children. One was the resumption of work. This did not seem to result in a reworking of identity, however, because her role as dietary aide seemed to mesh with her generative focus of caring for other people. A second change in life role occurred when her husband died. This change did not seem to affect the generative focus of her meaning, except that it moved increasingly outward to her friends, children, and grandchildren. Because Mary’s path was one of connectedness, there was little indication of attitudinal changes. This remained true at the time of our interview, and Mary indicated no sense of consciously struggling with integrity vs. despair. In summary, when Mary assumed the role of mother, her focus seemed to shift to one which was generative, which would be predicted by Erikson’s theory. In contrast to Erikson’s theory, however, Mary maintained a generative focus throughout the rest of her life, despite other changes in life roles.
Some of the writings from the Stone Center explore the theme of connectedness: "We believe the organizing factor in women's lives is 'relational growth'" (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991, p.1). They view every aspect of women's development from within the context of maintaining relationships. In contrast to Erikson, who emphasized increasing autonomy and independence, the Stone Center emphasizes how a person develops in relation to other people. Jean Baker Miller (1991) stated:

In Erikson's scheme, for example, after the first stage, in which the aim is the development of basic trust, the aim of every other stage, until young adulthood, is some form of increased separation or self-development....It is important to note that the aim is not something like development of greater capacity for emotional connection to others; or for contributing to an interchange between people; or for playing a part in the growth of others as well as one's self. (p.12)

When women's development is conceptualized in these terms, the predominant theme of connectedness in the women's narratives becomes more understandable. The women are talking not only about what is important to them, but also about their way of being in the world. The Stone Center writing helps me to understand connectedness as a central feature of women's development, in addition to being a path to meaning.

I found another quote by Baker Miller (1991) on altruism to be particularly enlightening:

In the dominant and official culture, attending to the experience of others and to the relationships between people is not seen as a requirement of all of life....[I do not mean women are more altruistic.] That is attempting to slot this description into the old categories. It suggests a 'sacrifice' of parts of a kind of self that has developed in a different fashion. To engage in the kind of interaction I am discussing is not a sacrifice; it is, in fact, a source of feeling better and more gratified, as well as more knowledgeable—about what is really happening. (p.16)

Since reading about Royce and Powell's three ways of being in the world--icarism, individualism, and altruism--I have struggled with altruism summarizing what I perceived to be the communion aspects of ways of being. It seemed to me that there could be
relationships that were meaningful, and dominant ways of being, that were not self-sacrificing. Baker Miller’s thoughts make it clear that relationships do not necessarily entail self-sacrifice, but that in fact they can lead to growth and development.

Baker Miller traced steps of Erikson’s model only up to adolescence from the view of relational development. She did not comment on the adult stages, which I have focused on in the discussion of meaning in life. The Stone Center model has not explored how one might go about examining growth in relation in the adult years. It is exciting, however, to consider the possibility that in addition to the cognitive model that we now have of development, and which has been adopted by many theories of meaning in life, there is potential to develop a relational model of growth, that would have application for the development of meaning in life in the connectedness path.

Hannah’s life meaning shows greater correspondence with Erikson’s theory. She moved from finding meaning in her identity as a laboratory technician, to developing intimacy in her marriage, to becoming generative in the raising of her children. Her life also changed when her husband died, and she resumed her career. Hannah did not seem to perceive the resumption of career as a significant shift in her personal meaning. Her generative and altruistic focus remained constant throughout her lifespan. It is also interesting to note that Hannah did not express struggling with integrity vs. despair. For this active and devoted woman, there are too many injustices in the world to be confronted, and too little time to spend pondering on her personal sense of order or coherence.

Clara’s narrative is illuminated by Erikson’s stage theory. Clara’s identity seemed to be focused in relationships. She viewed herself in terms of her connectedness with her family, particularly her sisters, then with her tennis gang, and then with her husband. Although there are many positive aspects to this approach to identity formation, one of the drawbacks may be in the nature of the relationship in which one defines oneself. When Clara found herself married to a man who seemed to hold traditional views about a man’s dominance in a relationship and who preferred social isolation, Clara’s extroverted and sociable identity had to be redefined. The new identity required of Clara never seemed to quite fit her. Erikson suggested that when identity is not achieved, it will be reworked and
create difficulties in later stages. In Clara’s narrative there were seeds of self-doubt, throughout her discussion of intimate relationships, generativity (particularly in the raising of her children), and a current struggle of integrity vs. despair.

Clara was one of the few women in the study who was struggling with integrity vs. despair. Since Clara moved into the city, she found that her old paths to meaning (connectedness and activity) were blocked. She was left with the attitudinal path, and that gave her more time to ponder her sense of order of the world. She found herself feeling quite ambivalent upon reviewing much of her life, and the world. In summary, I find Erikson’s theory to be quite illuminating in understanding the theme of ambivalence which was woven through Clara’s narrative.

Clara’s meaning in life can also be viewed through the lens of the Stone Center, and through it a new picture emerges. Clara entered her marriage with a view of her self-in-relation. She had good relationships with girlfriends and male friends, and seemed to have shared much of herself with them. When she was married, however, her empathy, sharing, and caring were not returned—at least not in the same fashion in which she gave it. She found herself needing to provide for her husband’s needs, but not having her emotional needs met. As Baker Miller (1991) put it, “She feels annihilated as a person” (p.24). At the same time, Clara sacrificed much of herself in order to maintain the relationship, and so there was difficulty in acknowledging some of its negative aspects. From this perspective it makes sense that a predominant theme of Clara’s narrative is ambivalence. When Clara’s relational self is violated in the marriage, it affects her ability to find meaning in connectedness. One of her primary paths to further developing her meaning is blocked throughout much of her life. She does become used to the level of connectedness that her husband is able to provide, but it is interesting to speculate on how Clara’s meaning in life could have been richer and fuller, if she had been married to someone who valued connectedness and who was able to develop in relation with her.

The narratives of Eleanor, Zara, Sally, Norma, and Ginny did not follow the ordering suggested by Erikson’s theory. The differences between their stories and Erikson’s theory have been noted in the results section. There are two general findings that stand in
opposition to a life transition model as being the most explanatory for these women’s changes in meaning in life. The first finding is the general absence, with the notable exception of Clara, of the stage of integrity vs. despair. Eleanor continued to find meaning and order in her faith, Mary continued to find meaning in her connectedness, and Hannah and Ginny continued to find meaning in activities. There was no conscious increase in struggling to find order or coherence. Many of the women in this study were young-old in that they were still very active and were not physically restricted by changes due to aging. It is possible that as physical restriction increases, their paths may be forced to shift to an attitudinal focus, thus increasing the likelihood of experiencing a meaning shift in line with integrity vs. despair. At this point Erikson’s theory of the shift to integrity vs. despair in old age does not fit for these women.

A second finding was that most women followed overall paths to meaning that were interwoven with life events throughout their lifespan. There were generally one, two, or three paths to meaning, and these paths stayed stable over the lifespan, rather than significantly shifting with changes in roles. There were certainly transitions and role changes in the women’s lives, but they perceived and described their meaning in relatively stable terms. A woman like Zara, who found meaning in her belief system, continued to wrestle with that belief system, and with attempting to place order on her world, throughout her life. Thus, integrity vs. despair was not an end stage for her, but a continuation of a struggle that she had throughout her life. Likewise, Norma’s paths of connectedness and creativity remained constant throughout her lifespan. Her life story follows the changes in life roles that are predicted by Erikson’s theory, but they are not the central focus of Norma’s narrative. It is rather the interweaving of connectedness and creativity throughout her lifespan.

Erikson’s theory is useful in understanding changes in life meaning for some women’s stories. For most of the women in this study, however, there was a greater sense of stability in the paths to meaning than there was transition in meaning due to changing life roles.
6.3.6 Carlsen

Carlsen’s theory suggests that life events or life crises can lead to the development of a meaning in life which increases in wisdom, generativity, flexibility in thought, open-mindedness, and transcendence. Carlsen’s theory was particularly relevant to an understanding of the development of personal meaning in Zara’s life. It also captures some elements of Hannah and Sally’s stories. It has limited applicability to understanding Mary’s, Clara’s, Eleanor’s, Norma’s, or Ginny’s stories.

Zara’s narrative demonstrated her qualities of flexibility in thought and openness to change. As life events occurred, she was open to new experiences and to changing her thinking as a result of the experiences. Increasing wisdom and generativity were also present in her story. Hannah and Sally also demonstrated the qualities of flexibility in thought and openness to experience. Hannah’s story suggested an increase in wisdom and generativity. Sally’s story suggested an increase in wisdom and transcendence. Thus there was a subset of women in this study for whom Carlsen’s theory was applicable.

In reviewing the stories that were consistent with Carlsen’s theory, it seemed that an essential starting point was an ability to think rather abstractly, and a willingness to be open-minded. If an individual was relatively concrete, and was closed to experience, her meaning in life may still have changed, but it was not as well captured by Carlsen’s theory.

Carlsen’s theory is also primarily focused on attitudinal changes in meaning in life. Experiential changes or creativity/activity changes are not examined. Clara’s experience of her meaning in life was quite different since the death of her husband, but that change was not reflected in Carlsen’s theory.

6.3.7 Fowler

Fowler’s theory of the stages of faith consciousness concerned not only religious faith, but any set of beliefs which a person held with commitment and emotional attachment. His stages of faith consciousness refer specifically to a blending of cognitive developmental theories, beliefs about the world, and spiritual elements. Fowler’s theory is designed to be universal and applicable to everyone. As I began applying it to these women’s narratives,
however, I noted some instances when it did not seem to be particularly illuminating. These were narratives in which the woman did not have a single central set of faith beliefs, in which the focus of meaning in life was experiential or connectedness rather than attitudinal, and in which the changes in meaning in life fell outside of the realm of cognitive-developmental.

Fowler posited a central set of faith beliefs around which a world view, a view of authority, a view of relationships, a view of self, and stages of cognitive development would be clustered. In reviewing the women’s narratives I found several instances where there was not a central set of faith beliefs, or a central motivating aspect of meaning in life. For example, Norma’s meaning in life was focused in creativity, connectedness, and in her religious beliefs. I found it difficult to place this plural meaning in life within the context of a central faith construction.

Fowler’s theory focuses on the cognitive aspects of meaning in life. He speaks of cognitions, attitudes, and world view. This focus resulted in his theory being less illuminating for women’s narratives that were focused in connectedness or creativity/activity. Mary’s and Clara’s connectedness and Norma’s creativity and connectedness could only be explored to a limited extent using cognitive terms. A different language would be required to explore them further.

Fowler’s view of change in meaning in life is primarily concerned with the cognitive-developmental stage upon which faith beliefs would be built. These women’s narratives suggested that there were some elements of meaning in life that undergo change, without that change being cognitive developmental in nature. These changes could not be recognized or readily accommodated by Fowler’s theory. Ginny’s faith was central to her meaning in life, and she reported that it changed over her life in that it strengthened and deepened, but her religious beliefs, or ultimate reality, changed very little. As was mentioned in Section 5.5.5.3, Fowler’s theory illuminates the lack of cognitive-developmental change, but it does not recognize the strengthening or fortitude in Ginny’s faith (Ford-Grabowsky, 1987).

Fowler’s theory was illuminating when considering Zara’s meaning in life. Zara was a questioner, and quite abstract in thought. She attempted to meld at least some of her beliefs with her life experiences, and as such her world view and her actions had more consistency,
coherence, and centrality in her life than in participants’ lives for whom the experienced and
the cognitive remained separate. Zara’s faith went through a number of changes over time,
moving from a faith internalized from her parents, to a faith born of her own convictions, to a
shaken faith which emerged with fewer frills and more ethics. These changes in her religious
beliefs seemed to parallel the changes in her world view, and as such there seemed to be one
central belief system and commitment that could be called faith. Because it was attitudinal in
nature, Fowler’s theory is appropriate in understanding the changes in Zara’s meaning in life.

6.3.8 Butler

Though not reviewed in the Introduction, an increased emphasis on life review as one
ages, as suggested by Butler (1970, 1975, 1982, & Butler, Lewis & Sunderland, 1991), is
much discussed in gerontology. All of the participants were asked if they engaged in life
review more frequently as they got older than they did when they were younger. This
question addressed both Erikson’s stage of integrity vs. despair, in which greater life review
is presumed to occur, and Butler’s (1970) theory of the need for increased life review to
resolve earlier issues, and to achieve a sense of closure. While this assumption of life review
increasing in old age makes some intuitive sense, the women in this study stated that they did
not think back over their life more frequently as they became older. This finding dovetails
with Shulik (1988) who also found no support for the hypothesis that older people review
their life more frequently.

6.3.9 Baumeister’s Meanings of Life

Baumeister’s theory captured many of the elements of change and stability in the
meanings of these women’s lives. Ginny, Clara, and Sally all faced difficulties in their
marriages. They all became aware of the negative aspects of their marriages relatively early
on. But because of economic, familial, and self-worth issues, they varied in their degree of
readiness to allow for a crystallization of discontent, and to follow-through with action. Both
Ginny and Sally recalled a focal incident, around which their discontent crystallized, which
gave them the impetus for change. Clara remained stuck at perceiving and ignoring isolated
negative events, without her discontent crystallizing or action being taken. When her
husband died, she was still unprepared to discover new sources of meaning. For these women, Baumeister’s theory provides some explanation of the process and difficulty of change.

Baumeister’s theory is less satisfying for women whose meaning is stable and satisfying. For example, Ginny’s faith journey was quite stable, and she found joy and satisfaction in it, despite some difficult situations in churches. Baumeister’s theory would suggest that she was rationalizing, justifying, and ignoring inconsistencies. This seems like a tremendous amount of effort to expend in maintaining the illusion of meaning. It did not seem to capture Ginny’s perception of joy or meaning in her faith. Thus while Baumeister’s theory seems to explain some elements of change in meaning in life quite well, it provides less illumination of stability.

The process of change that Baumeister identified seems more satisfying for voluntary meaning changes than for involuntary changes. Most people who have sudden life changes have no opportunity for a process of crystallization of discontent. They are suddenly faced with a change in meaning to which they must adjust. The death of Hannah’s husband was an example of such a life change. It forced her to make a transition to other sources of meaning, without any preparation. Hannah seemed to respond to this event with sadness, but also with her attitude of thankfulness, that enabled her to see positive aspects of the situation. This ability seemed to allow her to adjust well to her new life meanings. It seems possible that when an involuntary life event occurs, forcing changes in life meaning, it may not be important to experience a crystallization of discontent, but it may be important to experience a consolidation of new positives.

The factors influencing change in meaning in life that were identified in this study were an insufficient meaning in life structure, challenging life events, an abstract cognitive style, and openness to experience. These factors seem very similar to Baumeister’s theory of change. Implicit in Baumeister’s theory is the belief that most of our cognitive constructions are insufficient, and thus subject to deconstruction. Challenging life events and focal incidents are very similar, although Baumeister’s treatment of focal incidents is more
sophisticated. Baumeister recognized that the symbolism of focal incidents is more important than the actual nature of the event itself.

6.4 McAdams’ Narrative Approach

The women’s stories have thus far been viewed as retrospective accounts of the meaning they have found in their lives. It is acknowledged that these stories are both a construction of the participant and a co-construction of myself and the participant. Nevertheless, there is also an underlying assumption that the events which they recount and their interpretations have some correspondence with actual life events and their perspective on those events. The psychological literature which utilizes case histories relies upon this assumption of some correspondence between the life story told by an individual and some measure of psychological truth which can be found in such a story. The narrative approach is an emerging perspective within psychology that allows for the appreciation of the narratives as stories, rather than the recounting of life events. Utilizing this perspective allows us to view the narratives as creations of an individual, and to analyze the stories as contained creations, not necessarily closely corresponding to some outward reality. McAdams’ work was introduced as an example of a narrative approach that is directly concerned with meaning in life. He believed that the increasing development of identity, which was believed to provide purpose and unity to an individual’s life, would be reflected in the life stories. He used the standards of coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation, reconciliation, and generative integration, as a means of analyzing the maturity of a narrative form, and hence of identity.

When one considers the narratives as a whole, it seems that the narratives of Hannah, Zara, Norma, and Sally rank higher on the developmental standards of a story, Clara’s story falls somewhere in the middle, and the stories of Mary, Ginny, and Eleanor fall somewhat lower. What relationship is there between this ordering, and the extent to which they perceive their life to have meaning? It seems that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between these standards and the meaning in life which these participants would claim. Ginny, for example, would perceive herself to have a strong meaning in life, likely stronger
than Zara would claim. Despite being less developed, Ginny’s construction has proved to be enduring, resilient, and useful in helping her to find meaning in the world. In summary, McGee’s dimensions of narrative form and identity development do not seem to reflect the intensity with which a meaning in life was held or its utility for the women interviewed.

McGee’s standards do provide us with a way of understanding how one individual’s story may seem very compelling and another individual’s story may seem less so. I find Hannah’s story very compelling, to the extent that I found aspects of her story which I wished to emulate. I found Ginny’s story less compelling, primarily because of the lack of openness. McGee’s standards allow us to grapple with the complex issue of comparing one person’s story with another.

McGee’s standards also provide a way of understanding change. A focus on reconciliation through a story may indicate that a person has just finished going through a change process that has affected characters, themes, and plots, in a manner that requires reworking of the story. A focus on generative integration may suggest that the person is satisfied with other aspects of the story and is free to engage in generative activities. The elements of the change process are not clearly defined by McGee, but the narrative approach certainly provides an alternative view of change.

McGee’s standards do elevate the attitudinal aspects of meaning in life. His standards for good narratives are reminiscent of other developmental models, such as Fowler and Carlsen and, as such, focus on cognitive abilities, rather than experiential or affective aspects of meaning in life. In this sense his standards neglect other aspects of the development of meaning in life or identity, such as identity which is formed and developed within a limited social sphere or meaning in life which grows within a limiting set of faith beliefs.

6.5 Particularities and Generalities

As a qualitative piece of research, based on the interviews with a few women, who were not randomly sampled, the findings are not generalizable in the usual statistical sense. I wish to highlight a few findings from the study, which based on the comparison with the
literature, I believe may be particular to this sample, or to a similar age and gender cohort; and conversely I suggest which findings may be more generalizable. As Stake (1994) noted, each reader, bringing his/her own experiences to the data, will also make a decision regarding the particularities and the generalities.

One of the most predominant findings of this study was the centrality of connectedness as a path to meaning. Literature from the Stone Center (Jordan, et al; 1991) would suggest that connectedness and relations are particularly important for women. I believe that the importance of connectedness may be generalizable, not just to these older women, but across women of many different ages and different backgrounds. It may be less generalizable to men, particularly men of this cohort. In my own research on values, I found that men from this cohort had difficulty in discussing the value of relationships in their lives (Stockdale Winder, 1991). It seems quite likely that if men from this cohort were interviewed about meaning across their lifespans, work would feature prominently in many of the narratives. To this extent, the centrality of connectedness would need to be explored in survey research to determine its generalizability.

One finding of this study was the absence of achievement/obtaining/power as a path of meaning for these women. This group of women did not highly value these agentic concerns. I believe this finding was somewhat particular to this group of women. If I had interviewed a group of executives, I believe that the path of achievement/obtaining/power would have been quite central in more of the narratives. Within this cohort of women, many women were acculturated to value family and relationships, not work or power. A different cohort of women might think quite differently.

Contrary to my expectations, I found no themes of meaning which I, or the participants, attributed to the aging process. While many of the participants felt that life events had impinged upon their meaning, there was no consistent trend in the development or change in meaning with age. The women did not become more thoughtful, more reflective, more spiritual, or more conscious of mortality. In general, the paths and the modes of meaning which had carried them through life continued. Other studies which provide information about the degree of generalizability of this finding are mixed. In a review of the literature on
reminiscence, Kiernat (1983) found that there was no consistent evidence linking increased age with increased life review. Rather it occurred throughout the life-span. Some studies do suggest changes with age. Reker, Peacock, & Wong's (1987) study showed that goals seeking, and future meaning decreased with age. Existential vacuum showed a curvilinear relationship with age. Life purpose and death acceptance increased with age. Women viewed life as more under their control and expressed a stronger will to find meaning as compared with males. Their findings suggest that there are changes in meaning with age. Further longitudinal research would be necessary to answer this question more fully.

Another finding of this study was the importance of the experiential quality of meaning in life. This was reflected in the inclusion of objects of meaning, the object-focused path to meaning, and the "doing" and "feeling" modalities of meaning in life. From casual observation, it seems quite likely that this finding would be applicable to many other people besides older women. Many people seem to focus on experiential qualities of meaning, and are less concerned with life attitudes or cognitions.

It was also found that these women tended to have pluralistic, and not necessarily coherent, frameworks for meaning in life. Baumeister (1991) suggested that trend was becoming more predominant with each successive generation, thus it seems likely that this finding will generalize across gender and age.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of the study, which should be noted, to remind readers of the perimeters within which this study should be read and evaluated. It is explicitly about women's experiences, who are predominantly from a Saskatchewan culture, and who are generally within one age cohort. Many of the women had religious beliefs, and this undoubtedly affected the nature of meanings which were elicited.

Another limitation of the study was the exploration of affect. In this study, the role of affect was explored, but because it was not frequently mentioned by the women, its role remained unclear. Further research would be needed to understand whether affect is a component of meaning in life, a marker of change, a consequent of meaning, or some
combination of all three possibilities. It seems likely that if a woman has constructed a
meaning in life which is highly experiential, affect is likely both an essential component and
a consequent of meaning. If the meaning in life is attitudinal or transcendent, the necessity of
affect may be considerably lessened. For all of these constructions of meaning in life, affect
likely remains a marker of change in meaning in life, as it remains a marker of change for
many other areas of our lives.

The category of objects of meaning remains somewhat problematic. I have chosen to
explicitly recognize the concrete objects of experience which these women reported as being
central to their meaning. It is, however, at the price of less conceptual clarity because of the
mixing of the abstract cognitive elements of meaning in life with the concrete. It can be seen
as both a strength, because it reflects the experience of the participants, and a weakness,
because of some difficulties in conceptual clarity.

The problem of retrospection in a study of change is a difficult issue. The difficulty of
retrospection can be approached from both a post-positivist position and a constructivist
position. From a post-positivist position, I considered two authors’ opinions on our memory
for change. McAdams (1991, 1994) stated that individuals were more likely to construct a
coherent story that minimized change and emphasized stability and continuity. Costa &
McRae (1985), in a review of the personality change literature, noted that participants were
likely to believe that they had changed more than was suggested by a test-retest of personality
factors over a six-year period. It would seem that our memories can both exaggerate and
minimize change, leaving no obvious contradictions to assuming that retrospection follows a
middle course.

From a constructivist tradition, the role of retrospection ceases to be an issue. Within
constructivism, we are not concerned with an inner and outer reality or the degree to which
an inner reality follows the contours of an outer reality. It is the inner reality, the personal
meaning, and the construction of an individual upon which the research rests. Thus, if an
individual perceives and constructs change, that is the reality with which the researcher is to
be concerned. My own view, as I wrestle between a post-positivist paradigm and a
constructivist paradigm, is that there is important information to be learned in both traditions.
For this research project, however, the focus is on a construction of change, and the conclusions regarding change rest on these constructions, not on some outer reality.

6.7 Deconstructing Meaning in Life

This construction of meaning in life rests on two assumptions. One assumption is that theories and first-person accounts are able to inform each other, rather than being exclusionary forms of discourse. A second assumption is that meaning in life is an “object” that can be studied. In this section I explore these assumptions in more detail and discuss some of the difficulties inherent in making these assumptions.

Theories are powerful tools in ordering our constructions. They help us to see patterns, to understand change, and, in some sciences, to make predictions with some accuracy. Some theories, which are more descriptive in nature, simply help to order a chaotic world. As human beings we use theories every day so that our worlds are manageable patterns, rather than unsettling fragments. As Adams stated in *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*: “The Universe, as has been observed before, is an unsettlingly big place, a fact which for the sake of a quiet life most people tend to ignore” (Adams, 1993, p.198). One way of ignoring is to use theories, eitherimplicitly or explicitly, to constrain our reception of information.

From this perspective theories can be seen as being on a continuum ranging from the unarticulated, implicit schemas that we use each day in comprehending our world, to the well-articulated, carefully constructed form of discourse that is prominent in academia. There is no obvious contradiction in having first-person talk dialoguing with theory when these are the primary dimensions of comparison. From this perspective they are differences in sophistication of language, but not differences of form or dimension. Somewhere along the continuum, however, a dimensional shift seems to occur. In the personal theories that guide our everyday lives the particulars of situations, in all their complexities, are frequently allowed to remain. It is assumed by most of us that our personal theories must be flexible and accommodating to the hundreds of variations in a particular situation. Academic theories frequently depersonalize because they are supposed to be generalizable and universal and are
not to be applied to the individual. They cannot be flexible and accommodating, because they are meant to be testable and rigid.

Because of this significant difference in the forms of discourse, I believe it is vital that the two forms of discourse do interact with each other. When an academic theory is kept isolated, only to be explored by survey instruments designed to detect the dimensions which researchers infer from the theory to be important, the theory will become more academic, more general, less specific, and unable to speak to any person in particular. It becomes detached from the very "reality" to which it attempts to speak. In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, the authors note that theoretical discourse is generally from a height:

> Spacks contrasts gossip with discourse: "People discourse to one another; they gossip with.... One discourses from a height, gossips around the kitchen table."

Gossip concerns the personal, the particular, and frequently the petty; but it does not follow that it is a trivial activity. "Gossip, like poetry and fiction, penetrates to the truth of things." (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986, p.116).

In defense of theories, however, they do help us to make sense of our world. When our own lives are lived without reflection or ordering, concerned only with the particularities of everyday events, we become mired. Personal theorizing, some of which is likely achieved through "gossip," assists us to transcend the particular. If psychological theories are relevant to the everyday, they too can assist an individual in finding additional frameworks through which to organize the world. We must ensure that our theories attempt to speak to that world, and not to a construction held by a very few.

I have used the term "to have" meaning in life throughout this project, only being partially aware of my implicit assumption that meaning in life was an "object" that one could "have" and that one could "study." At some level I think I realized several years ago that meaning in life was not an object, but an experience. I struggled, however, for language. I struggled with including "my husband" as a source of meaning. Every good psychologist knew that "my husband" meant relationships, and I felt I should conform to this abstraction. I did not, however, and eventually that refusal allowed me to be open to the role that experience played in meaning in life. I still struggled, however, to objectify the experience of
meaning in life, because I did not know how to communicate my findings without this objectification. I have arrived at a compromise position, one which embeds the meaning in the women’s lives in their stories, but which still allows me to objectify and compare their meanings and the changes in those meanings with the theories. This compromise seems necessary to me. I cannot perceive how one might communicate information to other researchers, without objectifying even to a limited extent within the area of psychology. That being said, it is important to remember that some of these women may perceive themselves to “be” meaning rather than to “have” meaning.

In the end this research stands on both the merits it has as a research piece and on the philosophical assumptions readers bring to it. For some readers it will seem “meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14, New International Version Bible). From my perspective the winds of meaning in life in these prairie women’s accounts have taken me through many storms, but have returned me safely and with increased wisdom.

6.8 Conclusions

This study examined the retrospective accounts of eight older women in Saskatchewan, for the purposes of coming to an increased understanding of the experiences of meaning in life, and changes in those experiences. The key findings were the importance of connectedness as a path to meaning; the inclusion of experiential aspects of meaning in life (objects of meaning, object-focused path to meaning, and the “doing” and “feeling” modalities); the essential nature of life context; the need to specify the nature of change in meaning in life (e.g., distinguishing between change at a personal moral value level or at a path to meaning level) in order to understand its importance; and the acknowledgment of pluralistic constructions of meaning in life.

It was found that many of the theories of change in meaning in life could be applied to the women’s accounts. Different theories illuminated different aspects of the women’s accounts and provided a fuller, though at times more puzzling, picture. Some theories, such as Carlsen’s, which were heavily focused on the attitudinal aspects of meaning in life, had less relevance for these women. No one theory was applicable to all the women’s accounts.
There are many avenues of exploration open. A longitudinal study of changes in meaning in life would be fascinating in beginning to understand changes of construction of meaning over the life span. The role of affect could be explored, both as a marker for change, and as a marker of having reached a satisfying level of meaning. It would be interesting to see if some individuals do experience a lack of positive affect, yet consider themselves to have meaning. The experiential aspects of meaning in life need to be further explored, and their role in a theory of meaning in life needs to be developed and refined. Finally, the stability of meaning in life could be researched and the mechanisms of maintaining stability explored to determine if there are other factors at work in stability in addition to Baumeister’s proposed denial of contradictions and maintenance of illusions.
7. References


Appendix A  Recruitment Pamphlet
TALKING ABOUT YOUR LIFE

Researcher:
Fern Stockdale Winder
Psychology Department
University of Saskatchewan
Phone: 244-4273

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There are many different beliefs about what is important in life or what gives meaning to one's life. I am conducting a study on what older women in Saskatchewan have found to be meaningful in their lives. I would like to hear what you feel has given your life meaning or purpose, both now and in the past.

I will be asking women who participate in the study to talk about their life experiences, about significant events in their lives, about what has given them meaning and purpose during their lives, and to talk more generally about how they view life and their own lives in particular.

THE BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Many people find it an enjoyable and rewarding experience to have the opportunity to talk about what has been important to them over the course of their lives. It provides an opportunity for review and for reflection upon your life. After I have studied the transcripts of the interviews, I will be asking you to comment on my interpretation of what you have said. This process allows you to reflect more upon what you have said, and aids myself as a researcher in making sure that I am accurately reflecting your statements.

The benefit of this type of research for psychology is that it allows for a comparison of psychological theories with the experiences of real-life people. I believe that this process of comparison will be quite educational and will help to inform psychological thought on meaning in life.

WHAT THE STUDY INVOLVES FOR YOU

If you are a woman between 70 to 80 years of age (or thereabouts) and you would like to participate in the study, the interview would take approximately two to three hours of your
time. I also have a short questionnaire that you would complete at any time after the interview, which would take approximately 1/2 hour to answer. All information will be kept confidential. The interviews could be done in your home, or at the Psychology Department at the University of Saskatchewan, whichever is more convenient for you.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study. Please call me if you would like to participate in the study, or if you would like more information about the study. My phone number is 244-4273.
Appendix B  Pilot Interview Questions
Table B/1  Pilot Interview Questions

1. When you hear the term 'meaning in life,' what do you think of?
2. What was and is important in your life?
3. Do you feel that you have or have had a purpose in your life?
4. Where does your meaning in life come from?
5. If you were to summarize your view of life in a few words, what would you say?
6. When you think back over your life, has your purpose in life changed over time?
7. Have you ever noticed times in your life when the way in which you saw the world changed?
8. Have there been any events in your life which caused you to change your view of things significantly?
9. Did you see any changes in how you viewed life that were a result of the natural course of life, such as becoming an adult, getting married, or having children?
10. Do you see any changes in your meaning in life, or in your purpose in life that you would say were due to getting older?
11. Do you think back on your life more now as you are getting older than you did when you were younger?
12. Do you think more now about your own death than you did?
Appendix C  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Mary’s Meaning in Life
C.1 Personal Moral Values:

CARING FOR FAMILY:

- “looking after my family and my husband.” (67-68) See “children” under objects of meaning for more details on this value.

HOSPITALITY:

- She enjoys having her boss over for Christmas, and having visiting missionaries stay at her house. “Having people over and being friendly, which I try to do.” (446-447) Part of her purpose as a Christian.

COMFORTABLE LIFE:

- “I don’t want for anything as far as material things are, you know what I mean, money, that never worries me about money and, my purpose wasn’t to make piles of money. You know just have a comfortable life and that is what I did.” (613-619)

C.2 Objects of Meaning:

CHILDREN:

- “I had four children, of course, and I think I looked after them well, and none of them had serious illnesses,...so I thought I was a fairly good mother.” (15-20)

“They were certainly grown up in the church, they were there every Sunday till they left home.” (22-24) “they were very healthy and never had any trouble in school.” (106-107) Her meaning during the raising of her children seems to be centered in her responsibility to care for them, to ensure their good health, and to ensure their success in school. She also talks about their current occupations with some pride. Thus as she reflects on her children, it is with a sense of satisfaction of a job well done. There is also a current relationship in which the meaning is somewhat different, “I talk to them on a regular basis, all of them, usually it’s a Sunday and I can talk to all four of them on one day. One especially she phones me every Sunday morning, the other one might be hit or miss, she might phone me every second one or every two or something. I still have, you know contact with them all.” (139-148) “Family is most important. When I see people that have never had
any communication with family, I feel very, very sad.” (624-626) “It was important to look after my family first, if they were in need or if I needed to be at home, I probably would have had to quit my job or would have been, that would have been the answer, but everything went along too good for me, and the cooperation from all of them was terrific.” (667-673)

JOB:

- “I was very interested in my job and it was very fruitful for me, I had real good relations, there were 42 on staff and I can’t say that I ever argued with anyone or you know, and I’ve had very congenial people to work with except I should say the dieticians that I have worked under have been excellent people, and they were friends, you know true friends not really just you know the boss type....And used to have them over to my house and everything....For Christmas and she was a single lady, and she is still is single for that matter, but I enjoyed my work very, very much.” (68-85) “Part of my job was to see the patients, to serve them tea every afternoon, that was a highlight of the day, to see, well first thing in the morning, to pick up their menus. And I would say good morning about 150 times. It was very interesting of course, to see these people come in so sick and four or five days later they are ready to go home and they look happy and they are raring to go again. It was very interesting to see who was going to be in the bed next time. So you enjoyed meeting or seeing new people? Yea, meeting the public.” (158-180)

CHOIR:

- “I enjoyed the choir very, very much.” (181) “He was an excellent choir director and I think getting ready for two cantatas, twice a year for all our lives was really, really good for all of us to put our shoulder to the wheel and work at it, and you know it was hard work.” (313-318)

CHURCH WOMEN’S GROUP:

- She has been the treasurer, the secretary, and the president. “The women’s group I was very involved in missions, and at one time we had a lot of, we did hand crafts one meeting and next meeting missions, and it was very interesting because we used to have kind of a hobby craft, we had a lady that used to teach us crafts and we
did that for years. Something new every year. We did on flowers one time out of
one of those, violets and apple blossoms made out of, the Japanese paper...I enjoyed
the missions studies, I don’t usually take, like present a missions study anymore
and I enjoyed, we have tapes now, which I’ve enjoyed more than anything, because
it is on T.V. And we have missions come and I’ve had them several times as house
guests....We still meet twice a month and I don’t very often miss any of them. And
we only have a group of about 15 would be the most. Finding we are so, people I
went to school with, I see them, you know one of them, some of the members that I
have know all those years, that I went to school with.” (262-305) In the
importance of the women’s group, she again identifies relationships, and in long-
time connectedness. She also seems to find being hospitable and creative
important.

CHURCH:

• She has held various positions in the church. “We aren’t a very big group, we are
  only about 100 members, not a big congregation that you don’t know everybody
  that you’ve known them everyday, since day one. So you have pretty close ties in
  your church then. Yea, very much so, very much so.” (449-452)

LODGE WOMEN’S GROUP:

• She was a lifetime member and president of her district at one point. “It was very,
  very interesting to see people from all over Canada and the States.” (207-209)
  More interested in the social aspects than “in getting up there and being the
  cheese.” (226)

RELATIONSHIPS/CONNECTEDNESS:

• enjoys work because of good relations: “I had real good relations, there were 42 on
  staff and I can’t say that I ever argued with anyone or you know, and I’ve had very
  congenial people to work with except I should say the dieticians that I have worked
  under have been excellent people, and they were friends, you know true friends not
  really just you know the boss type. And used to have them over to my house and
  everything. For Christmas. (70-83) See “Job” for more on how she enjoyed
  visiting with the patients in the hospital.
values friendships: “But, as I said, Betty too when I saw her, if she was over or I’d
go over there, she’d say, you know you and I are wasting an awful lot of time, and I
said Betty, time wasted is not wasted, not when we are talking and good friends.”
(524-529)

enjoys seeing people: “I have the Health Nurse who comes once a week to do my
blood pressure and so forth and I look forward to her coming once a week. Usually
somebody, you know, somebody during the day will be coming in or things like
that…. Not that busy, but I mean there is the telephone. I’d be lost without it.”
(1064-1075)

FRIENDS:

“I’ve always had wonderful, wonderful neighbours all around me, I shouldn’t be
emotional, but I just lost my good neighbour, and we had 40 years together. I saw
her, I phoned her or talked to her pretty well everyday after I quit working you
know, and then I had time to. It is not even a year [since she died].” (407-416)
“And good friends, and we have a little group that goes, we’ve been doing it for ten
years and we have coffee every Wednesday morning.” (455-458) “Very, very
good ties. And if we don’t get to see each other now like we haven’t been doing,
but we phone each other, and tell each other how much we miss each other. How
long have you been meeting for? For over ten years. We do this on a regular basis.
And this was regular and I am not kidding.” (482-493) “I tell you we talk, we
could do politics or we could do our church work or just our families and that and
we have a great time together, we just have a wonderful time. You know we never
know what we are going to talk about, we just sit down here to talk and an hour and
a half or two hours later there is, sometimes it is 12:00 when it is time to go.” (511-
520) “You can’t get along without friends, I don’t think anybody can.” (1040-
1041)

PLANTS:

“My gardening. Gardening wasn’t that much, mostly my plants, I was very
involved in growing African violets, I had about 150 at one time.” (87-90) “I
never had a big garden, but my flowers are my priority.” (338-339)
CRAFTS:
- (referring to a vest she is crocheting) “I am still doing stuff here, for my grandchildren mostly, my granddaughters, mostly.” (91-93) A highlight of the women’s group was a regular craft time that they had.

C.3 Life Attitudes:

GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS:
- “I never ever thought that much about what my purpose was to, I’ve been a Christian as long as I can remember, since I was about 19, I was baptized, and that my purpose was to get along with people.” (403-407) “And as far as my you know my atmosphere around here, I’ve always been good friends with everyone around here.” (431-433)

SUMMARY:
- “I think my purpose is to be....To be a good mother and to be a good Christian and to be a good neighbour.” (538-539)
- “My whole purpose in life is to be a good neighbour and be good to people, and try to be a good person.” (544-546) “My purpose hasn’t changed. I think my outlook has always been the same, to live one day at a time and try to make the best of everyday.” (608-611)

TO HAVE AND NURTURE A FAMILY:
- “That is the purpose of anyone’s family or anyone’s life I would think, I mean you get married, you know naturally you hope to have family and of course looking after them health-wise and nurture, naturally.” (636-640)

C.4 Affective Colouring:
- “I’ve been happy, I can tell you that. I’ve never been a grouchy person I don’t think.” (571-573)

C.5 Change:

MARRIAGE TRANSITION NOT HARD:
- “That transition wasn’t that hard because mother and dad were only two miles down the road and I saw them often. You know, it wasn’t as if I was a hundred
miles away, never to speak of.” (976-981) Transitions don’t seem difficult if she can stay connected.

BIRTH OF BABIES:

- “Well, it was quite a shock to the system to realize that you had to look after a baby and we were milking cows and that, and we had to take him to the barn with us, not in the winter, if I didn’t have to go out, ??? It was a shock, because a little person needs attention every second.” (918-924)

CHILDREN LEAVING HOME:

- She really missed her children when they left home and worried about them.
  
  Missed the communication and the closeness.

SMOKING NO LONGER SO TERRIBLE:

- At one time she thought it was terrible that her son smoked. When she looks at society today, and sees some kids who have guns or are using drugs, she no longer feels smoking is so terrible.

PURPOSE UNCHANGED:

- “My purpose hasn’t changed. I think my outlook has always been the same, to live one day at a time and try to make the best of everyday.” (608-611)

PACE OF LIFE IS FASTER NOW:

- “Everything is on such a fast pace.” (791) “You used to go and get your groceries and have lots of time to be able to do it and now there is always crowds, you know, there is so many people around....You used to have so much time at the checkout, well now they get you through, by the time you get your groceries into the bag, you are out already. You know you used to sit and have a visit with everybody. And this way you don’t anymore, or everything is so computerized that, it is efficient, but not very friendly. By the time you unload your bag, they’ve already got it down the street and we are going.” (793-813) The increased pace of life threatens some of her sources of feeling connected with other people.

SHE TAKES THINGS SLOWER:

- “If I don’t feel like doing things, I’ll just leave it until tomorrow. My purpose is to stay healthy and be cheerful. If the weather is bad and I am not going to go out, it
is not worrying about me at all. I am not going to be out paying a bill that can wait until the next day. Oh yes, [in the past] when something had to be done, it had to be done right then. The car would go, and we'd be getting it done right then. Not tomorrow. I think that is when everybody slows down, when you are older.” (1081-1103)

EMOTIONALLY UPSET BUT NOT MEANING IN LIFE CHANGE:

- “I think that [lack of certainty in life] was brought home to us when we lost our father and we went sailing along for 20 some odd years before we lost mother and then the last year when we lost three in the, as I said when my neighbour and her family and it was all over in three months, and they were gone, all three of them. So, I mean they really shook us up, the whole community, I mean our coffee party girls and all those who were all involved in that family, in their home.” (890-902)

LOSS OF HUSBAND:

- “it's a whole new field when you get to be by yourself because I have the responsibility of the house, the car, the, just everything. It is just a horrible, horrible feeling, but I have to do it. But you have to do what you have to do. It is not easy, anyway. He was healthy until the last little while, I never really worried about his illness because he never ever had any problems until the last year....I didn't have a job then anymore, I was retired. And the quietness of the house and the idea that you know that you are alone, just, you live with it....And a lot of my friends are [widows]. And one by one we got to be the close, the best of my neighbours, they all lost their husbands before I did, so I sort of went through that with them....That he isn't there, because it is always in your mind.” (989-1033)

ON DEATH:

- “Do you think more now about your own death than you did? I don't think so. I just, I have a clear conscience, there isn't anything that I can do about it....I had the fear of the Lord put into me when they told me last fall that I would have to get out of the house and get into a unit where more people are around, so I could get them to check on me everyday, you know. And that kind of shook me up at first, but I thought, well I don't think this is going to happen until the next six months or a
year and may not happen until the next ten years because there are so many people who have their names in for these places, and there is just no place that they are going to go, so I am not worried about it. Because if I had to move the house tomorrow, I know that there isn’t going to be, because it isn’t going to happen. And if I do, I do.” (1113-1140)
Appendix D  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Clara’s Meaning in Life
D.1 Personal Moral Values:

INDEPENDENCE/SECURITY:

- moved to a new city by herself, prefers to go to meetings by herself. But, she would much rather be married. "if you’d say I’m really independent that my thoughts of trying to find another husband wouldn’t be a very important, but it is, I very much miss the security and that of having another human being just to be there when you are sick, or you know to just be there, period." (244-250)

HELP OTHERS IN NEED (UNCONDITIONALLY):

- "If you need help I should give it to you instead of, oh do it yourself, you don’t work hard enough you’re not going to have it, and all this sort of stuff.” (553-557) She believes that part of this belief comes as a result of living through the Dirty Thirties. She is trying to do this with her son as well, but she is losing a lot of money and is now finding that she has to take more control. I’m not sure if this fits here or not.

- "if there is a God is this what he meant us to do, keep these beautiful big buildings up while somebody needs some food or clothing or something.” (1579-1582)

- "we’ve all got to look after each other instead of look after you.” (1648-1649)

- "especially once you become a mother you are always looking out for, trying to do everything you can to make the babies happy and that follows out to other people and everything.” (1772-1776)

- except that, “like one old woman I picked her up once or twice and then she’d phone and so I was always picking her up and that, that kind of bothered me because I didn’t, she didn’t seem to realize that she actually was taking me three or four blocks out of my way you know, but in the meantime I still felt good.” (1966-1972) She likes to help other people, but she likes it to be recognized.

- also a decision not to stay at a seniors club resulted in some people missing her company.

- her husband used to donate to Salvation Army without her knowing about it. She was proud of him and described him as being very honourable.
- she does pick up hitchhikers and chastises those people who scold her for it. She believes if we all helped each other, the world would be a better place.

**NEED NOT WANT:**
- "when you look at the world situation, most people don’t even have a room to go to and I said that the thing works fine." (596-598) She looks at the condition of other people in the world and decides that she doesn’t need a flush toilet. "I don’t remember ever thinking you know I need money for something definite, it seemed like yes, when I thought we really did need something that it [we got it]." (1096-1099) She feels somewhat guilty about continuing to take her husband’s army pension money, even though she knows there are a lot of people who receive a lot more. Believes that it is important to look after each other, not to try to amass a fortune.
- “I’ve tried to convince my own kids not to want everything, don’t be putting your money into a lot of little trinkets that don’t mean a damn thing.” (2861-2864) Ex. Prefers the historical value of a vase.

**FRUGAL:**
- she is astonished at how much money her son and former daughter-in-law spent.
  “My son is not at all concerned, seemingly concerned about money and real things but his wife was 100% even worse.” (1148-1151)

**SETTING AN EXAMPLE:**
- “Once you have kids you certainly try to show them not only how to conduct them and lecture and how to be good, you try to make a good person to follow.” (1402-1405)

**NO WAR:**
- “I think it’s been too easy for the few people in this world to tell us that those people over there are horrible, we’ve got to kill them. But we’re killing the wrong people.” (1746-1749)
D.2 Objects of Meaning:

FRIENDSHIP:

- Before her marriage her friendship with the tennis gang was very important. They played tennis together, and danced together, and just had fun.

CHILDREN:

- "the happiness of my family, two grandchildren was most important, especially with the safety of these two babies, it is very, very, worrisome." (827-830)

HUSBAND:

- her past relationship with her husband: security: "I mean pretty well 24 hours of the day you are within calling distance of each other." (256-258)
- "You know you look back on your married life and like as I say you think oh god I miss him so much and yet when I go back and think of our lives at the farm, I'd be sitting at the kitchen table maybe doing books, I was secretary-treasurer to different outfits, all of them and he'd be sitting in the front room and to actually see his face I would have to move like this you know and look around the corner of the arch and, but the T.V. would be on and he was a great reader and he'd be reading and once in awhile we'd both giggle at the T.V....when he'd get up and go to bed...he'd never said are you coming dear, or I'm going to bed, he just got up and went to bed...and then when you are here completely by yourself, you are missing this." (273-291) "It's just missing not having somebody there." (298)
- "As I say our kitchen window looks right down the road to town when you wash the dishes. And I'm out there and start washing the dishes and I'm keep looking up, when is he coming, when is he coming." (1464-1468)
- "He was a terrific, yea I didn't really realize what a good solid foundation I had, or what we had. That's one of the things I say, you regret the fact that you can't say to him, were you happy, were you content with me? I'm quite positive we were but there is no way of telling now." (1474-1480) He was a good solid citizen.

COMPANIONSHIP:

- "like now I miss him because I come up here and all the excitement of coming up here and trying to establish and get things rolling and still....nobody is around that, I
haven’t found a replacement....I feel sorry for the younger generation because you know even if everything isn’t perfect, it’s better to have somebody that you can live with, you know, you don’t want to have to be seeing stars all the time, but to have somebody there.” (2435-2448)

SOCIALIZING:

- At first it was the tennis gang, “we’d dance all night on Saturday nights and stuff....we danced to records and that and it was always if you weren’t dancing you just yelled “Ladies Choice” and if there happened to be a man standing there...we were having a wild, wild time.” (1307-1320) Later she belonged to the church ladies, Home and School, the Legion Auxiliary, and the Archaeology Society, which were important social outlets for her, “I don’t know what the hell I had done if there hadn’t been the church women and Home and School and stuff to go out for a few nights once in awhile.” (1411-1414) “We spent an awful lot of time by ourselves.” (1514) The one time that she went out to a beer parlour she came home and the door was locked. Now that she has moved into the city, she attends various activities for seniors, and the Lapidary Club, “it was fun picking up fancy rocks too and looking at them, so...I did that just for something to do.” (820-823) She also goes to seniors classes. She would love it if she could dance again, “Now I think well if I did find a man that could dance to Glen Miller I’d be scared that one of us would died of a heart attack....it really thrills me when I boogie woogie.” (1522-1525, 1531-1532)

ATHLETIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- “I was looking through stuff and got thrilled to see all my, I cut my headlines out of the newspapers when I was getting my name on the headlines for tennis....I didn’t remember it at all. I’ve actually got my name in the paper from a swimming event and also badminton events.” (1246-1249)

SPORTS:

- “the joy of playing....just the joy, yea. Being able to do it...you just play...it didn’t matter if you win or lose, just have a darn good game and put your all into do it.” (1261, 1264, 1285-1287)
JOBS:
  - “It seems like my jobs are quite important to me....if you did your job well you had a job for as long as you wanted.” (1340-1341, 1358-1359) Enjoyed the physicality of the farm work.

NATURE:
  - She and her husband used to spend a lot of Sunday afternoons together exploring the outdoors around them, “I just love it, even now when I go back I like going out.” (764-765) “We spent an awful lot of time by ourselves. But, on Sundays we’d be out roving the hills and different things like that.” (1514-1516)
  - “I’m very much a naturalist.” (2485) She loves looking at the stones and plants and birds.
  - she also loved to go out and look at the stars.

TRIPS:
  - “very, very simple life, we had two trips down to the states, one just when [my husband] and I were there in a home made camper and then when the kids were [with us].” (1031-1035)

CHURCH:
  - “I used to go to church every Sunday but then it just, the last, before Christmas last year I think most of it was the world situation in a way, because so much of the fighting is going on because you don’t believe what I believe so I’ve got to kill you off.” (1569-1574)

D.3 Life Attitudes:
  - I am my brother’s keeper. (see values section)

TRADITIONAL:
  - “I guess in the long run he had every right to be looking after the money.” (1039-1040) But part of her resents his tight control, “In our early married life, [my husband] would always go into town in the morning and get the mail and unless it was seeding or harvest he went, but then they played pool or cards, the men, and as regular as clockwork he’d be home at 12:00 you know, but anyway one day he had come home and we were having lunch and after lunch I started getting tidied up a
bit and he said oh you got a meeting to go to? And I said no, I thought I’d go and have coffee with Maggie and we lived three and a half miles out of town and he said the truck has been to town once to town, ha, ha, you don’t go. I never, ever went in for coffee.” (1058-1071) Her beliefs seem to have shifted somewhat in this area, but the extent is unclear. She certainly is questioning it in some sense.

- “the old fashioned way we had it being wives and doing everything for our husbands, ha, ha. You know and that they were doing what they could for you.” (1406-1409)

- the one time that she went out to a beer parlour, she came home and the door was locked, “He was quite upset at that time with that. I thought he should be able to trust me.” (1427-1428)

THERE IS NO GOD:

- “I believe in love....we’ve all got a godly thing within us and if we let it come out and do the things that God wants us to do, the world would be a better place.” (1669-1670, 1678-1681)

- [I told him that.] “I did not believe in God, that I believed in things that come out of the Bible and I told them I said as far as I’m concerned the most important part of the Bible is ‘I am my brother’s keeper’ and I said if we don’t all start doing that sooner or later, it doesn’t mean a damn all the rest of it put together.” (545-551)

- if there is a God, why is there suffering?

- if the Bible is true, why is it interpreted so many different ways?

- faith in God should be followed by caring for others & she doesn’t see very many people doing that (1716-1719)

- it seems as though she continues to struggle with this belief. She noted a couple of examples of how people’s beliefs in God do not relate to their actions, “when they are supposed to be so god awful religious and they do things like that.” (2599-2601) “if they’d stay in their own little community and go out and do physically something with some other human beings, it, instead of just preaching it over the airlines.” (2610-2614) Somehow she has some element of faith that can be encouraged or discouraged by this behaviour.
• seeing other people live a good life, whether they are religious or not, is encouraging. For ex. her relatives and their work in an inner-city school.

EQUALIZATION:
• “I sit up here in this suite and feel guilty in this world, not in [city] but in this world to see that one person lives here with all this....It’s just not right in that, but the luxury of having the stuff and yet I look at the mansions and homes that they’ve got around the city and I’d like to know what, and there’d be a lot of real Christian people living in these big mansions and stuff and how do they feel about it?” (1681-1684, 1691-1697).

• “I’m awfully glad that I can get so much out of simple things...I don’t need to buy fancy stuff or anything that, the wonders of the world to me are still out there...You don’t have to worry about what you’ve got and what you haven’t got.” (2557-2564)

SOCIALISM:
• “My religion is my politics and my politics is my religion.” (1822-1824) “being good to everybody.” (1829-1830)

• Supports the NDP financially.

• “I better do what everybody thinks I should do.” (1793-1794) She states this in the context of doing the right thing for her adopted daughter, but, it seems to carry through her whole life.

• she would like to give more money away, but she worries about what other people would think.

FEELING USEFUL:
• wanted to volunteer at the hospital, but her doctor discouraged this. She enjoys her university classes, but wonders what good they are. “That felt rather quite useless....I look at people shovelling snow or planting gardens and I think I can’t even do that up here and a couple of years ago I used to feel like asking the men when they were working on the roads if I could help them...you definitely feel useless.” (1930-1937)
D.4 Affective Colouring:

- she misses her husband a lot and is very sad. "I cry and let the teardrops fall." (810) The sadness is a daily experience.
- "it’s very, very lonely." (2454)
- "I keep going simply because of my children. To be very truthful there are times that life is not going to change for me I may as well just go jump off the bridge and then I think I can’t put my kids through, people that love me I can’t put them through that, so I have to stick around whether I want to or not." (2774-2781) "I would dearly love to have somebody just to go and walk hand in hand and walk around the prairie." (2789-2791)
- she needs reassurance and support from others for her opinions, even on her own son. "Like I’ve talk...very openly about it down there and...I was positive that if they knew something that I didn’t know, you’d see them sort of gulp or sort of look at each other...but they are all pretty well standing behind [my son]." (926-937)
- "I always felt that everybody loved me, always have." (1327-1328) Except for the post mistress in her town. "I was the baby in the family and I don’t know, it was a wonderful way to grow up and just, even strangers sort of things and that I just automatically thought everybody loved me." (1334-1338)

SENSITIVITY TO THE PROBLEMS OF SOCIETY:

- She was very saddened by the bitterness she encountered in one young person.
  "thinking of the conditions of the world...and my own kids that have to keep going in this world and I don’t know, it isn’t a world I like. I think that the educated, with all the thousands and millions of educated people we’ve got in the world, surely they can see what they’re doing to human beings. It might be great for people about making money and saving money and all this stuff, but it isn’t doing anything for the human beings that are living in it...It’s much more important that you make somebody happy and contented." (2807-2821)
- wishes that we could reduce materialism and still keep people employed.
- Worry for our society: "I can’t do it, I don’t have the answer...they are bellinger at them about all the things that are wrong, but nobody seems to find any solutions to
bring forth.” (1587, 1590-1593) She does not like people who complain about the society or the government without offering any practical suggestions.

D.5 Change:

CHURCH:

- “I used to go to church every Sunday but then it just, the last, before Christmas last year I think most of it was the world situation in a way, because so much of the fighting is going on because you don’t believe what I believe so I’ve got to kill you off.” (1569-1574)
- believes that she has remained fairly constant in her beliefs.
- “I don’t honestly think I’ve changed that much, ha, ha, except since I’ve became more outspoken than I used to be, now I can say it more.” (2935-2937)
- she does not look back any more now than she used to. Although she thinks more about the world situation and the future for young people than she once did.
Appendix E  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Eleanor’s Meaning in Life
E.1 Personal Moral Values:

HARD WORK:

- "It was a lot of work and duty...I used to do as much as I could. I helped out." (64-66) She had very long hours as a telephone operator. Many daily tasks were made difficult by her paralysis.

KINDNESS:

- Eleanor frequently wept when she described the kindness of a neighbour, friend, or relative. She was very thankful for the kindness of other people. She was surprised but delighted when a volunteer brought her a new Bible. She extolled the kindness of another man who visited her: "I think he's wonderful to look after me ever since I've met him, he's been looking after me, in my chair, a crippled old lady....he's just so kind and thoughtful, he'd just do anything for you." (705-711)

E.2 Objects of Meaning:

CHRISTIAN FAITH:

- faithful attendance: even when it was difficult for Eleanor to attend church, she went regularly.

- reading her Bible: Eleanor reads her Bible and "I try to get everything out of what I read. That's always been important, for many many years." (518-520) "I just enjoy it, and I like to learn what the Lord says in the Bible." (545-546) It is important to Eleanor to confess all of her sins. It bothered her that she might not have confessed all of them.

- spiritual encouragement: a recent TV sermon on forgiveness was very encouraging: "She just had a sermon that was just suited to me exactly and she just raised me to the heights. I mean just made me very happy." (611-614)

- "Nothing, nothing ever could take its [her faith's] place. Nothing." (785-786)

STAFF:

- "The girls and the nurses, we have fun together. I tell one nurse that I like to see her laugh because she shakes like a bowl full of jelly." (502-505)
ENTERTAINMENT:

- Crossword puzzles, Scrabble games, and ball games on the TV.

MY SISTER AND EXTENDED FAMILY:

- "Having my sister in here means a lot to me....she moved in here to be close to me after I had my stroke." (627-628) She particularly enjoyed Scrabble games with her sister. "Having my friends and my sister come to see me cheers me up more than anything. I just love. I'm disappointed if they don't come. They cheer me up. I just love to have them come. I think they know I appreciate it very much. And they're so kind." (955-960) Eleanor's family made a point of looking out for her. She described how a relative had phoned a number of other relatives until the person had found someone who could come and fix her TV on the night that it was broken. Her walls are covered with pictures of family, and she had several small presents from them. The losses of her mother, father, brother, and another sister have been very difficult times for her.

FRIENDS:

- "Friends have always been important and always will be of course...Got to know a lot of people...and kept in touch with them." (942-946) One woman who boarded with her still comes to visit her. Another woman who volunteers from an Alliance church, and a man from a Baptist church who visits her have become very important aspects of her life: "He is a very good friend of mine....he comes to see me every week....Takes me around and shows me things. We look at the pictures that they put up...he likes to go down for coffee, I don't like drinking coffee, but I go with him." (676, 696-697, 711-716)

E.3 Life Attitudes:

IF IT'S THE LORD'S WILL:

- Eleanor accepted that what happened in her life was the Lord's will for her life. When she talked about death she stated, "I'm just here for maybe for today, and may be gone tomorrow. I just take it in my stride. The Lord will call me when he wants me." (1075-1078) While for some people, this attitude might involve a difficult struggle to relinquish control to a higher power, Eleanor seemed to have a
natural inclination to regard life events as out of her control. She frequently relied
on God or other people to give her life direction.

I THINK THE LORD PUT ME HERE FOR A PURPOSE...THAT I TRY TO FULFILL:

- This purpose involved talking with her nieces and nephews and telling them that
the Lord is coming soon. "The first and foremost important thing is being saved
and telling them about Jesus and his love and how he died on the cross to take their
sins and save their souls. And he has to be our Saviour and our Lord." (985-988)

E.4 Affective Colouring:

- It was my impression that Eleanor struggled with melancholy for most of her life.
  She noted that although her conversion experience raised her to the heights, the
  next day she felt as awful as she had before.
- Eleanor believed that since her stroke she has become much more emotional.

E.5 Change:

NO CHANGE FROM POLIO OR STROKE:

- Eleanor did not believe that the polio or the stroke had significantly changed how
  she viewed life. "[The polio] didn't have many effects on my life. Not very often
did I ever wish I could walk or run. I just knew I couldn't and that was it....And my
stroke I just took it in my stride like I say. I didn't feel badly or anything." (750-
756)

SECOND CONVERSION EXPERIENCE A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE:

- She had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ when she was 16, kneeling down in the
  kitchen, by a chair. "I kept it up for a little while, but I backslid for quite a few
years, then I came back to the Lord." (995-998) During the time that she was
backsliding, she was still teaching Sunday School, but she regretted that she had
taught "stories" rather than the gospel. Eleanor's second conversion experience was
the peak experience of her life: "I felt the need of the Lord very much, I was very
much under conviction....I was alone at the time...I just threw myself on the bed...I
was so happy. I had been so melancholy. Sad...I was raised to such heights of
glory. I sang hymns. I was in bed, you know, but I couldn't sleep. And in the
morning I felt terrible again....it took me a long time, but I finally realized that the Lord had forgiven my my sins, and, uhm, I could be happy again. Believe me it took a long time....I think it was years. To be really happy." (581-597) "It was absolutely fantastic. I never could believe I would be so happy. It was just a mountain peak." (600-602)

MORE DEPENDENT ON THE LORD:

- Eleanor believed that "I'm more dependent on the Lord now than I was before...believing what he says and trusting in his word....there's places that I wouldn't want to go, that I had gone to before." (789-797) She talked about how she had stopped going to dances.

NO FAITH CRIZES:

- It seemed that Eleanor's most significant loss in her life was when her brother died. She did not question her faith, but rather "I prayed all night, the night my brother died, I just prayed to the Lord, just prayed to the Lord, for my sister-in-law and her three children." (765-768)

FEW CHANGES DUE TO AGING:

- "I don't think I'm old, I think I'm a young girl yet. Although I'm beginning to feel as though I'm getting old. I could show you pictures...I used to smile from ear to ear. Now my mouth is a little....my face is stiff and I can't talk." (1017-1030)

- she does think back on the past more now, but she felt it was an even mixture of good and bad times that she recalled.

- she does not live her life any differently as death approaches.
Appendix F  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Hannah’s Meaning in Life
F.1 Personal Moral Values:

INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION:
- likes to work and enjoyed additional training in tuberculosis: "it was quite interesting, and we did start a lot of new tests and whatnot after that." (436-438)
  She has taken numerous trips abroad. She loves literature. She goes to university at a time when few people do.

THRIFTINESS:
- "I think we got about $65.00 a month. And I used to save enough to live on for the rest of the year on the farm." (172-174). "In fact it was almost a challenge to see how well you could do with very little." (1297-1298)

HARD WORK:
- Agrees to work for two months without pay in the hopes of getting a full time job afterwards.

SOCIALISM:
- "I think we were one of the, if not the first, one of the very first places where they gave free treatment for tuberculosis." (234-236)

RESPECT:
- "we go in and ask them and then we help them in whatever way we can." (541-542). In her work with an aid organization she respects people of other cultures.

GLOBAL AWARENESS:
- "I thought it would be good for my children to be in contact with a child in the developing country, you know, that was poor" (564-566)

PEACE/BASIC NECESSITIES FOR ALL:
- "I was reading the other day that I forget how many billion it would take to bring basic necessities to everybody in the world so there would be nobody starving. And that, it was a lot, it was several billion, but he said that is only three percent of the amount the world spends on the military. You know it's terrible, isn't it? You'd think that mankind is crazy." (610-619)

ACTIVE:
- "Oh yea, I'm busy all the time, I always have stuff ahead of me to do." (633-634)
ENVIRONMENT:

- Hannah belongs to an environmental group & she is glad her son is working for environmental causes.

LOW SOCIAL PRIORITY:

- "it's very gradual and then I think you just haven't got the energy to get out and do things, you haven't got the same desire to go out and to do things with people."
  (864-868) "I was just too busy for years and years to develop too many friends."
  (679-681)

SENSE OF JUSTICE:

- "I think it is sort of a sense of justice guides me more than anything else. I think it's so wrong that there is such terrible poverty and such wealth and the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer as they often say and it's true now. And I think that well that has a lot to do with my work in, that I [do], we're helping the poor people in the world." (1080-1089) "It's justice rather than equality I think because there is so many things which people are not equal, you know we're not born equal, you know in abilities and whatnot, but we should all have equal opportunities, you know. And I, it's all very difficult, you know, you say that we live in this Western World and here am I, living in, I suppose by western standards, with Canadian standards, this would almost be a humble setting, but yet in comparison with the slums that so many people live in, I'm living in luxury, you know it's not fair, it's not just, and how far does it guide your life? I don't know, it certainly guides it to a certain extent, but how much I don't know because it's not exactly equal sharing, is it? Not many of us are willing to live in the most humble circumstances in order to share with others that are so hard up." (1091-1110)

NOT MATERIALISM:

- "I think you get a lot more satisfaction being a good neighbour than getting some new furniture sometimes," (1316-1319). "Maybe it [the Depression] taught us too though that you could have a good time with very little money. That you didn't have to have material things to enjoy life, because we used to have marvelous times out on the farm going to country school dances where you just you know, they just,
a few people would take down the desks and pile them up at the back of the room, school room, and we’d all dance and somebody could play the piano, no there wouldn’t be piano, but usually somebody would have a fiddle and someone would have a uke or something like it, very primitive sort of thing, music, but we used to have fun.” (1189-1203)

- “I think I’d tell [young people] not to make the acquiring of material things the most important thing in their life. Because I think that a lot of lives are spoiled by people that just think that they should, that they have to work and work and work in order to gain more and more money to get more and more worldly things.” (1281-1288)

**F.2 Objects of Meaning**

**PEOPLE:**

- “I wanted something where I would be working with people, I think rather than sitting in an office all day doing accounts or something,” (96-99).

**CHILDREN:**

- loves them greatly. “Well, I think bringing up my family probably has been more important to me than anything else.” (652-654) “Well, I think, moments of joy, I think when each one of my children were born. I love little babies. I was just so thrilled with them every time, ha, ha, ha. I used to think oh isn’t she or he beautiful.” (954-957) She is glad they have turned out to be good people: “I think they are making a contribution towards making this world a better place.” (687-688). They are a source of support for her now: “And its mighty nice to know when you’re older that you have a family that cares about you and my family has been very good to me.” (669-671) Also, “Well, there is nothing more interesting than seeing a small child develop, even in the first few weeks of their life, it is just amazing, you know?” (660-663)
VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

- “I guess the volunteer work I do for organizations [gives me meaning]....I think I am doing something worthwhile. I think all these organizations that I am involved in are good.” (802-815)

FAITH:

- “I think for a long time I was an agnostic. And then I gradually developed a faith and when I joined the Catholic Church I think that gave more meaning to my life.” (1000-1003) “Well, it seemed to mean so much to him [my husband], and be such a comfort to him and I think, he never doubted but what, there was another world and after he died that he’d be going to and I don’t know, there seemed to be a sort of a, I think there was at that time more than there is now a sort of bond between the various members of the church at that time, as I say I think more than now. But all this was appealing and I sort of envied them for their, that they had this and I didn’t. And, I began to pray, not knowing whether there really was a personal God or not but, and I began to believe there was, but I can’t express it any better than that. I seemed to be given faith.” (1020-1035) “I think it was much easier to accept the loss of my husband when he died probably.” (1063-1064) A religious faith makes it easier to accept the death of someone close, but it’s no reason to have the faith. (1074-1075) This section was also placed under Change.

F.3 Life Attitudes

THANKFULNESS:

- “Yea, it was disappointing, but, those Dirty Thirties were tough years, there were lots of people suffered a lot more than I did. We always had enough to eat.” (150-154) (On not being able to complete her medical training). “I was fortunate in that they were all in school by that time.” (374-375). On coping after her husband’s death. “I think I could if I were in different circumstances, but you know, I have good health, I’ve never starved, you know, I’ve never been desperate in any of these ways. I’ve been very fortunate.” (1139-1143)
REALISM:

- "it was the best thing they could do at that time." (356-357). She is talking about the medical treatment her husband received for TB. No bitterness, simply acceptance.

- "We can’t expect to be lucky forever, you know. You’ve got to, I think you’ve got to expect, accept the fact that life is pretty much a gamble, you can’t always expect everything to go your way." (1150-1155)

- "I went through the Dirty Thirties you know when things were really tough and as I say, I always, we had enough to eat, we weren’t starved, but we surely didn’t have a lot of things that we would have liked to have had....it made us realize that you couldn’t count on everything going clear sailing, you know. That there were risks in this life. Depending on the time you were born and so forth. They were tough times." (1161-1189)

ACTIVE RATHER THAN REFLECTIVE:

- "As I say, I’m not a reflective sort of person, I never stop to think about these things," (743-745).

DEDICATION:

- In Hannah’s descriptions about her life, her speech seems to have an underlying sense of dedication. She was a dedicated mother, she worked hard at her jobs and believed in her work, and she believes in the volunteer causes she actively supports. She is not humourless, by any stretch of the imagination, but the commitments which she makes are not frivolous.

F.4 Affective Colouring:

STABLE AND POSITIVE:

- "I don’t think I ever do feel very discouraged or hopeless. I think I could if I were in different circumstances, but you know, I have good health, I’ve never starved, you know, I’ve never been desperate in any of these ways. I’ve been very fortunate." (1138-1143)
F.5 Change:

FRIENDS DIE & FRIENDSHIPS CHANGE:

- “Well, I haven’t got a great many friends, not nearly as many as I did a few years ago. I went to two funerals of friends last month, and it was surprising how you get, the numbers dwindle down and you don’t seem to make close friends I don’t think as you get older. Like you do when you are younger, somehow or other, at least I have found that.” (840-847)

FAITH:

- Hannah came from a Methodist/United background. When she went to university, “Well, I suppose that in the first place when I began doubting all this, with as I say we used to have lots of discussion groups about all these things....Used to stay in residence and lots of times we used to get together you know and talk about all these things and I suppose that I was a bit shaken or disturbed at that time to have become doubtful as far as my religious faith was concerned.” (1049-1059)

- “I think for a long time I was an agnostic. And then I gradually developed a faith and when I joined the Catholic Church I think that gave more meaning to my life.” (1000-1003) “Well, it seemed to mean so much to him [my husband], and be such a comfort to him and I think, he never doubted but what, there was another world and after he died that he’d be going to and I don’t know, there seemed to be a sort of a, I think there was at that time more than there is now a sort of bond between the various members of the church at that time, as I say I think more than now. But all this was appealing and I sort of envied them for their, that they had this and I didn’t. And, I began to pray, not knowing whether there really was a personal God or not but, and I began to believe there was, but I can’t express it any better than that. I seemed to be given faith.” (1020-1035) “I think it was much easier to accept the loss of my husband when he died probably.” (1063-1064) A religious faith makes it easier to accept the death of someone close, but it’s no reason to have the faith. (1074-1075) This section on faith was also placed under Objects of Meaning.
MEANING IN LIFE CHANGE:

- "I find that kind of hard to answer because I'm doing different things from what I used to do. For years my meaning and purpose pretty well revolved around my own family, I didn't have too many outside interests. Now my family are out on their own and I don't do very much for them. Occasionally I do, I'm going up to babysit for my daughter next week because her husband is away at conference, and needs someone. But I think my way of sort of looking at things, I don't know has changed that much. I don't think so." (905-918)

LESS MATERIAL NEED:

- "Well, there's very few things I want now, as I was younger there always seemed to be something I wanted to get, you know a new appliance or a new something or other, and there are very few things now that I do, and not so interested in doing window shopping." (1327-1332)

LITTLE CHANGE DUE TO AGING:

- She does not reminisce more now. She does think about death more, partially because she goes to more funerals. The effect on her life has been that she has put her affairs in order. "But I don't, now what is the word I want, I don't dwell on it. Because after all it is part of life and we all know it is." (1411-1416)
Appendix G  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Zara's Meaning in Life
G.1 Personal Moral Values:

HARD WORK:

- The government wanted her to continue to work for them because she worked hard. She made sacrifices to put her children through school. She continues to write during her retirement.

FREEDOM:

- Zara emphasized the importance of freedom in many different aspects of her life. She noted the freedom of a Muslim woman to decide on her marriage partner, even in an arranged marriage, "It's never done without the consent of the girl" (262-263). She also noted that she had not arranged her daughters' marriages because, "I wanted my daughters to be freer than I was." (378-379) Her children were given freedom in their religion and freedom in their choice of partners. Her personal freedom is also important, "As long as I have my freedom to go, to wear this, to eat whatever food I want to, to live wherever I want to, then I have no problem." (1196-1199)

EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN:

- Zara believes strongly in equality but she is not a "rigid feminist": "In our country the women were human rights right from the beginning, the women and men are made the same...I find that the women [here] have become over, over aggressive and you know this business of you know, again I find that maybe I am old fashioned that way and but I find there is too much of it and so, probably it is right." (1799-1810)

EQUALITY OF RACES & RELIGIONS:

- "And also mixing up with when you have children and European children, African children, Chinese children, Japanese children, you grow up right from the beginning with and depending at home how they tell you, like we were taught never, we were always taught that everybody is equal....We are all equal, no religion is better than ours and no religion, our religion is not worse than the others. Everyone is right, they are all there....And everybody has to respect that. It depends so much on how you are brought up." (458-476) She loves all her siblings equally
no matter their religion. She struggles with the concept of multiculturalism, "I don't understand this multi-culturalism. I find, I've come here and picked up so many labels every time there is racialized women or women of minority or colour." (1162-1166) She would just like to be a person without the addition of race or nationality. "I am very uncomfortable with all of that, I just want to be a human being....similarly now if I become a Canadian, I want to be a Canadian, I don't want to be anything other than that." (1182-1191) "We do not want to be minorities, we are not going to be labelled as minorities, if we are going to live in this country [Tanzania], we want equal rights and equal responsibilities." (1331-1334)

FAITH:

- "Religion is a very, very, personal matter...somehow I have never been able to accept a lot of things in religion like people do. Like you know mine depends on intellect, not on faith....it started with faith but it has not remained faith later on. You see you found that you, as you went on and you saw the world and how things were in the world and all of that, that had an effect on you and when I was in India when India was partitioned and I saw the millions get killed...Now when I see on the television all these Bosnia and all of that, now I cannot respect religion very much when I see all these things which are being done in the world, whether it is my religion or it's some other religion. Somehow I can't respect it when I find that in the name of religion all of these, a lot of things have been done." (482-504)

- she no longer rigidly follows the rituals of her religion, although she has an active spiritual life, which includes prayer and meditation: "With Muslims we have a prayer for everything, you know, you don't say it loudly, but is it like a reflex action, like anything, you sip food and the prayer, you have to say a prayer. You finish it and you have to say, thank God, you know, in three small words, to start and to finish in everything and entering the house, going out of the house, for walking on the road....You know, it is a constant prayer and it is so much in you all the time and one thing is that you are told to [endure hardship] and... don't get too excited by things...they are always a challenge." (2573-2589)
"My faith in God [is important] because I feel that we human beings have, can have direct contact with God. We don't have to, I don't mean a Christian God or a Muslim God, just I will say God, something that you feel for instance, when I'm very down I just want to be on my own, I've come here and I don't want to go to a church or anything I just sit here and be quiet, meditate and it passes." (2639-2647) "I don't want any intermediaries to their [her children's] God, I want them direct relationship with their God, they don't need any intermediaries, like the priest." (687-689) "I feel that you can have direct communication with your maker. And, I've had experience of that in my life, once, ?? it shook me." (2654-2657) Tells the story of how food came to her uncle's house: "To me at that time that food was sent by God. And I've had experiences, little experiences that because God knew we were all hungry and that this people came to invite us." (2700-2704)

early on she began to think out aspects of her faith, such as God being human according to Catholic teachings. She also pondered how there could be one God that you could talk and pray to, but that would punish as well. "I didn't think he could be so loving and could punish a person so much." (557-558) Gradually she decided that anyone good was going to heaven. Not just Muslims and Christians.

The ethics of religion are more important than the frills, "I don't believe in all that humbug about the spiritual life and I said that. If my children, I mean, I teach them the ethics of religion, I'm not worried about rituals and frills." (671-674)

RESPECT:

- It is important to respect other's religious beliefs: "that is the most discomfort I find here that they thrust their religion on you....I've read about every religion...I love a lot of things in all the religions, but then other people start thrusting them on you and trying to tell you that this is better, that is where I disagree." (520-528) Her children were not to be forced to follow Christian traditions at their schools.

- "I was only eight years old when my father died and I used to go with him to places and he used to be sometimes speaking and all that, and you know talking and I remember hearing as a child you heard. But I always heard him saying that we must, by living in the narrow confines of your own religion you get, you get
detached from other people and you must not do that, you must respect everybody's religion, trying to understand it." (592-602) As part of her respect for other people, she would not dare give advice to others. People have to decide for themselves. Things may be different for others so you can't give advice. (2748-2754)

HUMAN DIGNITY:

- Dignity is the opposite of the product of racism. "[You were] always made to feel your culture was inferior, your language was inferior, you were inferior....Now once when you felt that you could stand up with your head...if not better, we just like everybody else, you know that kind of thing is human dignity....as a complete human being." (1707-1720) "A person's dignity is very important to me, whether a person is black or a white or, that is immaterial, but a person I think, that is really, and I would work for that, I mean, I would work for that, but I think that I have worked for that all my life and I would work for that." (1879-1885) "I feel that a man is a person is not a means to an end, he is an end in himself." (1875-1877)

GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE:

- She believed that the average Canadian knows very little about global affairs but they should know a lot more. Technology & material wealth have interfered with knowledge about the outside world. She is amazed at how much Canadians grumble, and seem unaware of how lucky they are, or how high their standard of living is.

G.2 Objects of Meaning:

MARRIAGE:

- Zara has been married for 54 years. She found that the fact that her children went away to boarding school brought she and her husband closer together. Being a homemaker was very important to her. She would not take a job that took her away from her home for long periods of time. "I'm a little old fashioned we have the same couple we started with each other." (2838-2839)
LEARNING:

- Learning and knowledge were very important to Zara, "I have been always seeking for knowledge." 1547-1548 "I wanted to know things." (1572-1573) Zara has studied many religions. She enjoyed her early schooling, and she would have greatly liked to go to university. She worked hard to ensure that her children received a good education. "All my children were educated in England and they went to the best English schools, you know public schools and universities and all that." (610-613) She chose challenging occupations. Politics were an opportunity to learn more about the world. That was "when I really learned about the world...how the politics in the world go..." (839-841) "My political experience was very important to know about human beings and human nature and to know about the countries and the world." (2533-2535) Learning seems to include some element of self-improvement, "We were not interested only in the house and parties and fun, we were interested in improving ourselves and all sorts of things." (768-770) "opportunities galore here [in Canada] to improve yourself." (1277-1278)

TRAVEL:

- Zara believes that travel is important in broadening one's experiences. "When I look around here people, some of them haven't even moved out of Saskatoon." (58-60) "I find I was always very interested in travelling...I was lucky meeting different people and all." (832-835)

FAMILY:

- Zara's extended family and her own children were very important to her. "Now you know if, I mean if I want my family I don't consider it a purpose, I think it's just part of me....You know like this is a finger, but it is part of my whole body and if it hurts I'm hurt." (1966-1972) She found it very difficult to decide to put her children in boarding school for a good education. She would now choose to have them at home, but at the time she made sacrifices for them to go. She was worried they would become detached. They are independent and they all live in different parts of the world, but they are still in contact. "I sent my children to boarding school because at that time I felt well that was the best thing to do for them. Now I
think if I had to do that again, I wouldn't do it, I'd be with them because I missed so much in that time, although we have kept in touch, but there is also a lot we have lost." (2805-2812) She misses greatly her son, who used to live in Africa.

WRITING:

- "I always had this desire to write." (836) "Being able to write all the things that have happened, there are some things I've enjoyed, some things I have not enjoyed and I find that has been...the expression itself....like some people paint and I'll write." (2502-2509)

G.3 Life Attitudes:

FLURALISM/OPEN-MINDED:

- She demonstrated an ability throughout our talk to present two sides of an issue and also explored the inner tension this sometimes created. For example, she has many doubts about her own religion or any religion. She cited the examples of the cost to human life in the building of the Taj Mahal and the great Cathedrals. (2442-2457) "At what cost these things have we?" (2457) Her parents were open-minded, "That is how I was brought up...my father was fairly broad minded, my mother was very religious, but even then she was quite modern." (295-300) She is pluralistic in her approach to religion to some degree, "I've read about every religion and there are, and I love a lot of things in all the religions, but then other people start thrusting them on you and trying to tell you that this is better, that is where I disagree." (523-528)

BIG THINKER:

- Pettiness bothers Zara. She becomes exasperated with neighbours who complain about broken milk cartons, aches & pains, and young people moving into their apartment building. She is somewhat of an idealist and a dreamer. She thinks and plans on a large-scale. For example, when she was in politics, her new government attempted too much.
GLOBAL:

- Zara finds Canada rather narrow - ex. lawyers can't practise from province to province. "It's very surprising you find in, this is the only place we find like that. The rest of the world is not like that. They [in Canada] are very, very narrow, everything is in such compartments and you know everything is very provincial, there is no global or even the rest of the Canada." (965-971) The attitude in Saskatoon is rather confining for her: "We didn't have very many material things, we lived in not very grand houses, not very grand roads, not very grand shops, in our shops you could buy not as much as you can buy here, but our minds were broader." (1231-1236)

LIFE IS A COMBINATION OF SUCCESS & FAILURE:

- "I think my life has been just like everybody else's, success, the life of success as well as failures all together." (1833-1835) There are cycles of good luck and bad luck. Normal human beings have their share of both.

HUMILITY:

- Zara feels humbled by the problems of the world. "[Being in politics] elates you but at the same time you feel very humble and to have experienced it all, it still makes you feel how insignificant one is, you know because, all right the problems of the world are so much that you can't help it, anything, that frustrates me." (2541-2547) Zara disliked seeing the rich and the poor side by side, and poverty being tolerated.

SYSTEMS NOT RELATIONAL:

- Zara believes that other people cannot take your problems from you. She is self-contained in her personal relationships. But she works hard at a systems level as is evident from her nine years in parliament.

NO PURPOSE OR MISSION:

- "People are always talking of purposes in life and all that, I have still not found what is purpose in life." (444-446) "I don't even feel that there should be a purpose in life, because I feel that you should just, you live according to the circumstances and the way you are, a lot of things are not decided for you, you don't decide for
yourself, they are decided for you and you make the best of the things that are given to you." (1847-1854) "Like I do not like these set missions. I may change tomorrow, I may think of something I am a very changeable person." (1895-1897) "I have never been able to give a proper answer for purpose in life, you know I am still, I do not know, I am still looking for something....I am still looking and change may get it or may go away, without getting it, or I may have it and I don't know about it." (1976-1984)

MEANING IN LIFE SUMMARY:

- "I would say love of God, your creator or and then you know love for your family, those who are close to you, tolerance, you know, forgiveness, tolerance and things like that you know that are part of you in life...And these kinds of things give meaning to your life." (1940-1944)

**G.4 Affective Colouring:**

ENDURE:

- "you are told to [endure hardship in my culture]... don't get too excited by things...they are always a challenge." (2587-2589) Although Zara made this statement, she struck me as a person who was emotionally responsive to events around her, whether that was being angry about injustices, or excited about learning new information. She was very animated during the interview.

**G.5 Change:**

FAITH CHANGE:

- "Like you know mine depends on intellect, not on faith. You know like, it started with faith but it has not remained faith later on. You see you found that you, as you went on and you saw the world and how things were in the world and all of that, that had an effect on you and when I was in India when India was partitioned and I saw the millions get killed, already though in Africa there were revolutions. Now when I see on the television all these Bosnia and all of that, now I cannot respect religion very much when I see all these things which are being done in the world, whether it is my religion or it's some other religion." (486-501) "I went away from
religion...I had seen the people living side by side and overnight they became enemies. And both sides I saw were equally bad. It was not that one was more at fault than the other. And now that affected me for sometime and then later on. It turned me away from religion a lot. And because there was too much and this fighting was because of religion." (2277-2289) "At that time I would be praying five times a day, like going to the Mosque praying, doing all the things that a Muslim woman should do and all that and after that I found that a lot of things were not important, ceased to be important, and I said I'm going to do what I like."

(2309-2315) "I am a Muslim, I pray in the Muslim way, I go to a Muslim Mosque, but I don't rigidly follow things that maybe I am supposed to follow and it doesn't worry me that I am going to go to hell or heaven, which it did when I was a child." (507-513)

TRADITIONAL TO LIBERAL:

- There is a tension throughout Zara’s talk between the respect that she had for the religious values that she was taught when a child, and her decisions to cast aside some of those traditions later. "Marriage is a religious obligation, although I didn't do the same to my daughters, but my mother had to, felt that I should be married and the way I was brought up, that was the right thing to do, and then I could go on studying afterwards." (169-176) "I have been more liberal in a lot of things." (369-370) "I was brought up very religiously myself, but over the years...I started thinking for myself...so I wanted my daughters to be freer than I was." (374-379) "I used to think for myself even as a child, but and I would say that I don't want and then you see like you are always frightened, you know the religions are like that, I'm sure the Christians, I know so much, I have so many Christian friends, you know this business of heaven and hell, that you know if you feel that you are doing something against your religion, you always think you are going to burn in hell, now when I got rid of that idea that I'm going to burn in hell, then a lot of things became easy." (392-403)
"if you don't think like everybody else, you are alone isn't it?....I have broken a lot of traditions....if I break a lot of those traditions then I am alone, isn't it?" (1993-2003)

PERSONALITY CHANGE:

"But you know as you go you change, it is a changing process all the time, your personality changes, the way, then you meet a man, you live with him with his family and all of that, and then especially I find instead of just staying in one place, then you move about and you widen your circle, even your horizon widens automatically." (447-453)

CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE:

"I don't know if it is the purpose that has changed me, but I find that circumstances have changed me very much....No do you call that purpose? Like I did not go deliberately to change myself." (2027-2032)

"I have never been very comfortable with meaning of life because I've not understood it myself. Because I find you know one human beings, they act so differently in different circumstances, you know when you are in the middle of war you should go to Bosnia and all your purposes will be very different here...You go to India...There are revolutions and things like that and when you see people dying of starvation and things like that, then you know, I find all these things change....I probably live in the present and I do think a lot about the past helps me to do sort of learn new things or to accept new things." (2129-2147)

"And so you know a lot of these things, like I find that all you have changed in the sense that now I am married to a man whose half Chinese and half Indian, now I have a lot of this, some things I've taken his, and some he's taken mine." (2062-2068)

"We've had people very sick in the family and that has, all right, we've had circumstances changing, like we've gone from one country, lost everything in one country and then we've gone to another country and started life right from the beginning, but it has become a challenge every time, but you did feel, you know we did feel the loss of it." (2197-2205)
AGE CHANGES:

- Age may have left Zara less "excitable" about things. (2010-2015)
- She does believe that she responds to events differently now than in the past. She was bold in the past, a boldness that was due to ignorance. (2785-2789)
Appendix H  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Sally’s Meaning in Life
H.1 PERSONAL MORAL VALUES:

SELF-KNOWLEDGE/UNDERSTANDING:

- she works at putting together her background and trying to understand. She learned some things from Al-Anon: “got some grasp on things from it, certainly worth going...then realized that I was repeating myself and I needed to move on and learn from it.” (1723-1727) “you grasp the knowledge, you know every once in awhile a little door opens up and you say to yourself uh-huh. And that is important.” (1783-1786) Books open up the world as well, “there is something here and I never thought about that or it’s opened up a door....A new perspective or just some little edge, something that could...pertain to me.” (1800-1806)

INDEPENDENCE:

- Sally went back to work, to create some independence for herself and for her children. “I think one of the best things that I could have done for my children was to give my children their freedom.” (2532-2534) “I also started to prepare my children to look after themselves in the best way that I knew how.” (2549-2551) “So I taught my children how to be independent and self-sufficient as quickly as they could. The idea that my children were going to get away and I wasn’t. If I was trapped, they would be safe.” (2567-2572) “I was working so hard to get them free. And my children are all free, and they’re all successful people.” (2586-2588)

RESOURCE FOR OTHERS:

- “I’ve always hoped for my grandchildren that I’m going to be some sort of resource that they can use if they get into trouble....rather than having a clingy relationship, I would sooner be a resource for people. Strength when they needed it and comfort when they wanted it.” (2598-2606)

HUMOUR:

- black sense of humour to cope. “I can laugh at a lot of the situations or I can find something funny about them or something amusing around me that maybe I can just leave them aside and look at it.” ((1340-1344) She attracted other people with this sense of humour. Verbal repartee on the phones. “I’ve always had this quirky sense of humour that’s ability to giggle in spite of.” (1904-1906)
DIGNITY:

- “those people there treated me like I was human.” (1358-1359)

PEACEMAKING:

- “I’m the guy that got on with everybody, I’m the middle child and I’m the peacemaker, okay.” (1400-1402)

LOOK AFTER MYSELF:

- this seems to be a value she only arrived at mid to late in life. Including separating from her husband. “I retired, I suddenly realized that the situation I was in was bad for me and maybe even abusive as well....And got myself out of it.” (2003-2007) “I just do what I need to do for me. I can’t do for anybody else. I remember thinking once upon a time, you could do this for somebody and I can’t do for somebody unless they ask me. Cause invariably when you do for sombody what you think they want, it may not be true at all. It’s what you want for yourself and not what they want...I don’t take on jobs that are unasked for...if I do what they want me to do, I have to make very sure it’s good for me first. Cause if it’s not good for me, I’m not going to do it.” (2154-2168) “I came to the conclusion that the biggest job I had was to keep myself safe, that’s just for the beginning, and if everything isn’t at the core of keeping myself safe, then I’m not succeeding.” (2169-2173)

BE OPEN TO EXPERIENCE:

- “always seek...I think seeking is important. Seeking is,...I’m open to everything.” Open to being invited or doing things at the spur of the moment.

H.2 OBJECTS OF MEANING:

READING/INFORMATION:

- “I am a huge reader.” (900-901) When she needs to know information she goes to the library and gets out books. “I read all the addiction books that I could find.” (1234-1235). “Certainly got a whole bunch of information about the disease.” (1731-1732) (referring to Al-Anon) “I’ve often read books for knowledge and do seek knowledge through books.” (1902-1903) She has read books that have changed her life.
ENVIRONMENT:

- “I also feel responsibility toward the environment which is why I’m involved in environmental things. But that’s leaving something behind for my grandchildren.” (2173-2177)

NATURE:

- “Moments of joy or peak experiences serve to refill my bank and give me new strengths to draw on in time of adversity. Nature is almost always a peak experience for me, seeing and touching. I feel very close to a spiritual being, the grand master planner, if you will.” (2063-2072)

H.3 LIFE ATTITUDES:

LIVE ONE DAY AT A TIME:

- “Some time in the area of a major crisis I learned the concept of living for today, and allowing the day previous or the ones not yet here alone. There were many people who helped me to practise this concept, some of them were in the Alanon program.” (2056-2062) Much of her life was spent living in fear that someone wouldn’t like her, or someone wouldn’t approve of her, or just her own fears about her abilities. She began to realize that she did not have a life at all. She needed to live one day at a time: “I don’t think that you have to live with fear. If you know that first of all there’s certain things you can’t change, things external to yourself you’ve got no control over, and you don’t muck in those things.” (2209-2214)

LIVE YOUR OWN LIFE:

- “Live your own life. Everybody’s got their own journey and they have to live it to the best of their ability. And nobody can live it for them, you can’t live anybody else’s for them. They live their own journey.” (2225-2229)

- she tells two stories that she read which impacted on her: one was a story about creatures on the ocean bottom who thought it was marvelous when one of them decided to let go and float free. The other was a story about a man who was a religious leader who, “finally decides he’s tired of pleasing everybody, and he needs his own life.” (2344-2346) “What would you say if I told you that God had
told me that my life was, that what I had to do in this life was just go forward and be happy?” (2356-2359)

GET A LIFE:

- “The idea is to get a life. As quickly as you can. Get a life.” (2612-2613)
  “consider yourself climbing a mountain and that you’ve hit a snag where you can’t get up over it so you sit on the ledge and you dangle your feet for awhile and rest. And then sooner or later you’ll see another way to go around it. And continue on.
  People waste their time and their energy wondering why, worrying about yesterday, and all that’s wasted energy. It also keeps people from doing things effectively.” (2620-2630)

SENSE OF HOPE:

- “I’ve always had a sense of hope....I always know that something is going to...be okay in the end. I don’t know what that is, fate? Maybe just plain dumb, I don’t know, no, whenever I got into a corner, I always knew I was going to get out of it somehow...Maybe even something outside of myself.” (1980-1992)

- “My sense of hope—is tied in to what I tried to explain [about my meaning in life]. It also goes back to my first answer and my sense of life as a journey. I don’t mean you to think that I sit idly by and let come and get me. I run at it head on. I believe if I am aware, or open, if I will listen and be aware certain opportunities will come my way, certain events will happen which are out of my control but I need not sit idly by. I can draw on my inner resources, listen to my inner voices and act on my best instincts. I do not believe my job is to sit on my tail and let a higher power do everything for me. I believe that the power will give me the strength or courage to get up and do the things that I must do for myself. I can also trust that things will evolve as they are supposed to if I do my share.” (2084-2105)

LIFE IS A JOURNEY:

- “The meaning or purpose in my life is based on the fact that I believe that my life is a journey that I am on. It is up to me to carry on the journey and discover all of the things that I am supposed to know. I don’t believe that it is necessary for me to know the whys or the end result. I may find out some answers from time to time,
but whether or not I know what it is about does not make it any more or less valid.”
(2023-2032)
OVERALL PLAN:
- “I also believe that there is a power stronger than myself who may be guiding me,
or at any rate watching over me. I believe my journey is unfolding a story or is a
step in some larger plan, it is not important for me to know the purpose of this plan
or the out come. I believe my life is just a blink in the overall plan of things.”
(2033-2040)
- only recently has she been able to verbalize these beliefs. She believed she needed
to go through a number of experiences before this journey became clear.
SPIRITUAL BELIEFS:
- On the Afterlife: “you have a spirit and that the body dies but your spirit lives on,
and there’s no, you can’t erase the spirit because you never know who you
touched.” (2285-2289) “I think you have a spirit that lives on. I don’t think that
anybody can remove the spirit. And whether or not you get to come back or
whatever you do, I have no idea about, and I really don’t care. I guess if you’re
remembered for the good things you did in life, at least the things you did that
changed somebody else, or helped somebody else, isn’t that it? That’s all that’s
important, really.” (2300-2309)
- Gifts of Encouragement: “The experiences that have confirmed my sense of
meaning in life are very difficult to define. They are always of a spiritual
“mysterious” nature. They usually come through other people. I call them my
gifts. I have learnt that I receive many little gifts throughout a day, it is therefore
not always just one thing but a combination or accumulation of events. I have
learned to watch for my small gifts and to say thank you for them when they
arrive.” (2073-2083)
H.4 AFFECTIVE COLOURING:
- Sally recounts many events in her life with a neutral tone. Her emotions seem to be
quite stable, and she seems to be somewhat distant from them.
H.5 CHANGE:

MEANING MOVES TO BEING MORE INTERNAL:

- At one time the meaning in her life was dependent on others and circumstances. Now her sense of meaning is internal not external. “things would really, things would really throw me then and make me really upset, and, uhm, not at good harmony with myself because of them, but, no, I think a person has to get into their own skin before they get settled down.” (2117-2122)

EFFECTS OF LOSSES:

- “There have been a number of losses in my life, some of a rather traumatic nature. I believe each time that I passed through some new crisis and survived it and was able to move forward I gained strength and a sense of self-esteem which helped me to keep moving ahead.” (2050-2056)

- “Moments of joy seem to have a lot less impact on my life than the times of great difficulty, when I have to locate my inner resources and draw on them.”

CHANGE IN ATTITUDE TOWARD HER MARRIAGE AND HER ALCOHOLIC HUSBAND:

- The attitudes she was raised with made it difficult to gain a new perspective. “You get to buy into the attitudes that you don’t really know what you are doing.” (1298-1299) When she married, she believed that her glamorous new husband must know more than she, a farm girl. Her husband’s view: “you are just a farmer and dumb farmers don’t know anything.” (1306-1307)

- She realized something was wrong with her marriage, and made a decision to go back to work in order to provide for her children. A second cognitive shift occurred when colleagues made her question her assumptions: “I’d like to walk home tonight and why can’t you?...what happens does the clock strike or does the ax come down or like how come?” (748-758)

AGING INCREASES RESOURCES:

- “the further I walk the more things I learn. When you begin at the beginning of a journey you only have very few resources. You gather them as you go.” (2380-2383)
Appendix I  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Norma’s Meaning in Life
1.1 Personal Moral Values:

NO ALCOHOL:

- she and her husband made a decision not to drink alcohol. Norma noted that they had lots of friends, so it certainly wasn’t necessary to drink alcohol.

COOPERATION:

- “I had a very supportive, cooperative family. We sort of believe in cooperation right from the word go, you know? We believe in the philosophy of it very strongly.” (233-237) The cooperation of her family allowed her to pursue her art. “If you really believe in cooperation, everything falls into place...if you have a desire to do something and the family cooperate with you, it’s much easier to accomplish it. Oh, love and understanding all go hand-in-hand with it...if you’re sort of at loggerheads with each other, you can’t really accomplish a great deal.” (728-735) Cooperation was the most important aspect of her marriage and her family. “Together you can do so much more than you can do individually.” (737-738) Picnics, fixing up a trailer, and building a cottage were all achieved through cooperation.

- she also believes in the philosophy of cooperation which is demonstrated in the NDP, the Wheat Pool, and the Co-op stores. She actively supported these institutions, and she felt that it was important to act on beliefs: “I just think if you believe in something, you’re going to support it. Otherwise why believe in it.” (1740-1742)

KINDNESS:

- Norma believed that kindness gave her meaning and purpose in her life: “Other people’s kindness to me, yes, and also, hopefully my kindness to other people. It gives a person a lot of satisfaction to know that you can help someone or add to their happiness somehow.” (924-928) It seemed that much of Norma’s life revolved around her friendships and these friendships were filled with kindness.

FREEDOM WITHIN ART:

- “For my own personal enjoyment and growth, I love to be creative and do my own thing....I don’t like to do anything I don’t feel good about doing.” (409-411, 403-
She resisted painting from snapshots or painting for money because she felt that her creativity might be stifled and somehow compromised.

**TOLERANCE:**
- Norma chose not to paint for money, but “there’s nothing wrong with it, if you feel good about doing it, but if you don’t feel good about doing it then I don’t think you should do it.” (401-403)

**INVOLVEMENT IN CHURCH AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS:**
- Norma believed that it was important to be involved in her church and her community. She assumed many leadership roles over the years.

### I.2 Objects of Meaning:

**MUSIC:**
- “My dad, he loved to sing...we’d come home from church, and I was just a little wee kid, I can just barely remember. And he would say, come on, let’s have some music. And he would sing and I would play. And somehow I learned to play....I play all the time and I can’t read a note...I play constantly. I hardly go by the piano I don’t sit down and play....[Music has been] very important. Yes. For my own therapy. Yeah, at night when I can’t sleep I either paint or play or write poetry.” (188-207)
- “I enjoy listening to it. I love music of all kinds.” (571-572)

**PAINTING:**
- “I can remember way back when I was small...we would get goldenrod, Mom always helped me with this...we boiled that up and get yellows, and I used blue ink, and red beet juice, and that gave me my three primary colours. And I could make lots of pretty things with just that stuff.” (212-219)
- taught painting classes for a number of years.

**FREEDOM WITHIN HER ART:**
- “I do a lot of photography, but I never paint from it....I feel inhibited when I have to.” (273-275)  “I’d have to use a ruler, and I’d have to be within lines. I’d feel
stifled in some ways. I’d love to do the river and have it flowing and trees and stuff.” (322-325)

THERAPY:

• “It’s good for my soul.” (285) “In the middle of the night when I can’t sleep, I just take out my watercolours in the kitchen, and make a cup of coffee and paint for a couple of hours...It is good for me. It’s good for my soul....I think it does something for you....if I either play the piano or the organ or paint or write poetry....I’m alone here, it’s quiet, there’s not a sound, and somehow it brings you closer to whatever you’re doing....it just sort of frees you from the world. You [are] sort of in outer space...Just for awhile.” (281-303) “You sort of lose yourself in [the art].” (1511)

COMMUNICATION OF HER EXPERIENCE:

• “I’ll try to portray the feeling I got and the message I got when I looked at that scene. Cause I feel a good piece of artwork should say something to you.” (342-346)

HONESTY:

• “a tree to me has to look like a tree, and not like a box. It would bother me to make a box and say, now there’s a tree, but some people think they can get away with that. I think it’s too gimmicky. It doesn’t seem honest. It must be because lots of intelligent honest people do it, but not, it’s not for me.” (350-355)

PHOTOGRAPHY:

• “I’ve started doing a lot of photography....I love nature so much...I take far more than I should.” (437-440) She has gone on a couple of photography expeditions. “I started making travelogues and photo essays....I like writing poetry so my script is usually in a poetic form. And I use music as a background and I have these all ready to go, I’ve shown them to all kinds of seniors groups....So I’m sharing them with others, and, I enjoy sharing them.” (465-477)
BEAUTY/NATURE:

- "I love the landscape work because I think our creation is so beautiful. I just love living here and look out this window. It doesn’t matter what season of the year. I love winter because it’s so beautiful. The blue-shadowed snow." (275-280)

LEARNING:

- Norma took a variety of art classes, some at the university, some at Banff School of Fine Arts, and some in Britain. The experience of learning and improving her painting is enjoyable to her.

FRIENDS:

- Norma has friends at her church, friends from community organizations, and friends from leisure activities: “People are important. I belong to a little bridge club and we’ve been together, the four of us have been together for 25 or 26 years...It’s the friendship more than the bridge.” (856-860) Norma also mentioned that friends had supported her through her stay in the hospital by visiting and by bringing her meals when she was convalescing.

IMMEDIATE FAMILY:

- “My marriage to my husband, the birth of our three children, and the way they’ve all turned out to be such great girls...and we have five lovely grandchildren....Basically the family was very important.” (690-697) Norma appreciated her adult daughters’ thoughtfulness. “We always had a good relationship with each one. And they knew we loved them...no matter what they did. And I think that’s important.” (807-810)

EXTENDED FAMILY:

- She and her brothers met frequently and she greatly appreciated their love and support. “We’re just very close, very close friends, which is very very fortunate...We get along really well. Keep in touch all the time.” (1704-1712)

CHURCH:

- Church was a source of moral encouragement, a meeting of friends, and a time of revitalization: “If you really want to live a Christian life, you go to church because there is a family of people there that feel the same as you do, or they wouldn’t be
there. And there is a good fellowship...we have friends, very close friends in the church.” (835-839) “It’s sort of a way to recharge your batteries too. I mean if you feel kind of let down by the end of the week...it’s not just a weekend thing, it’s something that goes on through the week, but sometimes you need a recharge at some particular point. And I think you get support for what you do believe from the people that care in the same way you do.” (848-856)

FAITH:

- Norma’s faith gave her hope for the future. When one of her friends died suddenly, she was happy for her friend, even though she would miss her, because Norma had faith in an eternal future.

TRAVEL:

- “I’ve been very lucky to have been able to travel, we’ve travelled a tremendous amount.” (675-677)

SPORTS:

- Sports were at one time an important part of Norma’s life. “I did an awful lot of curling in my life.” (842-843)

1.3 Life Attitudes:

A VISUAL PERSPECTIVE:

- Norma thinks in pictures and colours: “I’m lying in bed and I’m not sleeping, and I’m thinking prairie skies, and I’m thinking about all the beauty and the form and the colour in clouds.” (295-298)

MY CREATIVE ABILITIES ARE GIFTS FROM GOD:

- “I really feel that any of the gifts that I have are gifts from God...I feel strongly about that. Because it’s just natural for me to go over there and play the iano. There must be some reason that I’m able to.” (543-547)

LIFE IS GOOD:

- Norma chooses to focus on the positive aspects of life. Although she acknowledges difficult times in her life, she cuts the conversation short around these areas. I think that she generally consciously minimizes the negative aspects of life. “I’m not
complaining, just have to look around to see so many people so much worse off, don’t you?” (667-669)

THERE IS A HIGHER POWER:

- “I believe there is a power above us, well, not necessarily above us, but in us, around us, in each one of us actually, for good or evil or whatever...I find it hard to express just how I do feel.” (828-831) “You just have to look at the birth of a baby...or out on the farm in the spring, the colts and the calves, and birth, and life in general...the miracle of it is...beyond human.” (1420-1424)

PROBLEMS IN LIFE MAKE US BETTER PEOPLE:

- “I really strongly believe that if we didn’t have problems we wouldn’t be very good people. I think problems make us better people...I believe that if we have problems and...we seek help, we are sent strength to handle them. Now that may be God or a power that be or whatever a person wants to say, but, somehow we are sent the strength to handle what comes to us if we are receptive to it. Mind you, if we are not receptive, then, pretty hard to help somebody if they don’t want to be helped.” (1401-1413)

OUR PURPOSE IS TO SHARE AND CARE:

- “I really believe in helping others...as much as possible. Sometimes you can’t do as much as you’d like, but do what you can. I think that’s the important thing in life, really, I believe that. Love thy neighbour as thyself. I think that’s what our purpose in being born is to share and care...I don’t know how else to say it. I think sharing and caring are the two words that are very important...when you get older you start to think back [about]...what has kept you strong through the years. Cause there are times...when things are not easy.” (1069-1084) Sharing and caring has kept Norma going through hurts and disappointments.

1.4 Affective Colouring:

- Norma stated that she didn’t get discouraged very easily.
1.5 Change:

NO FAITH CHANGE:

- Norma did not believe that her faith or her religious beliefs had changed over her life span. She described the process by which her parents’ beliefs became her own: “I think they were instilled in me from my mom and dad and as a child they sort of expected me to do certain things, and then as you get older you realize that these are the best things to do anyways.” (889-893)

CONSTANCY IN MEANING IN LIFE:

- Norma believed that her meaning in life had stayed fairly constant over the years, although they have much more materially now than they did at the beginning of their marriage.

AGE CHANGES:

- “I think as...I grow older, I think maybe a little more about the importance of each day because time is so limited.” (1379-1382)
- The approach of death has not changed how Norma lives her life, because “If you’re trying to live each day the best you can, you can’t do anymore, can you?” (1588-1590)
- Norma did think back more on her life now than she had earlier in her life, “I think you’re reminded of it more.” (1623-1624) The memories, however, were positive ones: “I think I’ve had a good life. I’ve been very fortunate to have the support...and love and caring of the whole family.” (1644-1647)
- Norma is less active in curling or in the church than she used to be.
Appendix J  Thematic/Structural Analysis of Ginny’s Meaning in Life
J.1 Personal Moral Values:

DO THE TASKS GOD PUTS IN FRONT OF YOU:

- “I just felt that I was doing what the Lord had put in my hands to do.” (48-50)

STAY POSITIVE:

- In all the negativity of the world it is important to stay positive: “There is so much negative stuff going on in the world now, but I think young people have a tendency to be very easily discouraged by it. Young people? All of us...You know, about what is going on in the world and to try and keep your mind settled on things that are good and clean and positive, because there is just so much filth around.” (1143-1151)

J.1 Objects of Meaning:

THE CHURCH:

- “The only experiences that were ever important to me were my church, with my church life and my whole growing up, you know in all of my younger years anyways, my whole life just centred entirely around the church.” (6-10)

SENSE OF BELONGING:

- “I was really praying and I said, Father, I have to belong somewhere, because unless I am doing something in a church at that time, I didn’t feel that I belonged.” (767-770)

ACTIVITIES:

- She remembers becoming involved in church activities at an early age, “They were always giving me things to do.” (25) “I would, every week be asked to lead the prayer, opening prayer or lead the singing or sing a solo, you know, just off the cuff.” (33-36) These early activities seem to have sustained her interest in the church, and to have assisted her in maintaining her connection with other people.

- Later on, “My kids were then starting to come into Sunday school and club activities and so on and I was always in choir and so I got into the ladies missionary fellowship, Cradle Roll, Pioneer Girls, every night of the week sort of a thing.” (40-45) These activities she now construes as the Lord’s way of protecting her, and
perhaps even her own way of escaping from the reality of her difficult first marriage.

- Currently: "That has definitely changed. The things that I do now that keep me busy now, I do because I enjoy doing them. And everything I do, whether it is in the church or out of the church I do it now because I feel it is something that the Lord has put in my hand to do and I just simply count on him to give me the strength to do the best job that I can with whatever it is." (494-502)

- she is now heavily involved in promoting activities for seniors. Sometimes the activities come at the expense of other desires: "I can't get over to see you as much as I would like to because I am trying to keep other seniors from getting into the position that you are in, sitting there, feeling sorry for yourself all the time." (1329-1333)

- "because I see myself coming up into you know, the age where so many of these people are that I am working with, and I want to help them keep active and in me helping them keep active, I am keeping myself active." (1371-1375)

CHOIR:

- "You know how you get the feeling when your mind is going and going and going on your studies and I would just feel like, ohhh, but then it was time to go to choir, and I didn't feel like going but by the time we started singing, I was in you know, I just felt wonderful again, yea, I felt good again, and I could come home and be raring to go, you know, that was nice." (176-184)

CHILDREN:

- Prayed for them and was involved in their activities. Currently she is distressed because she feels like she has been a "total failure" with her children and two of them have recently rejected her.

THE LORD:

- "The Lord is the only meaning and the only purpose that, in my life, period. Because, if it wasn't for my relationship with the Lord, I wouldn't be smiling right now in this [problem] situation." (848-853)
• “I was forced when my children were very young to just literally fall on the Lord in a way that I am sure I never would have if I had had a good relationship with my husband. Because I am the sort of person who would have leaned on my husband.” (874-879)

• “I started I guess, just before I went to University, writing, even my prayers, like I write what happened through the day and I comment on what happens through the day and then I literally talk to my heavenly father for however many pages I feel like talking about what has been bothering me and so on.” (884-890)

• “I don’t know how people survive without the Lord, I really don’t. Because I know I couldn’t. I know I’ve got a few friends that think that I am strong and stubborn, [but I feel]...Dependent, insecure, you know, inferiority complex, all of these negative things...And they’d always seen me as so self-assured, and you know, I looked at that and said, but that is me, that’s what I am really like apart from what the Lord makes me. And, they were sort of stunned for a minute, oh, yea. They were Christians so they could understand what I was saying.” (913-948)

NATURE:

• “I’d just head for the hills, you know because I was more interested in being out in the hills than in books, you know.” (204-207)

HIGH SOCIETY:

• “I guess my lack of contentment was in the fact that, see my father comes from a peasant...family, my mother from... [royal] stock. And, those two sides were always warring inside of me, growing up. So, I was always pulled to the wild life, you know, the wildlife as in nature and this through my father and through the high class, high society, you know that was an attraction to me.” (1021-1032)

• “so that was always at war in me, until, as I say until my own children came and I had other things to think about. But, now you know, I mean over the years as my relationship with the Lord has strengthened, that I mean, neither side pulls me one way or the other, you know, I am aware of, I love nature, I love being out in the country and that, and when I visit relatives who have everything I have no problem,
I am quite comfortable with the everything too, but I don’t crave it, you know, I don’t long for it for myself like I used to.” (1035-1047)

J.3 Life Attitudes:

THE LORD INTERVenes IN LIVES DIRECTLY:

· “They sent my application away and then [I] became absolutely terrified at the thought, so one Sunday afternoon after church I decided I was going to write a letter to the university, withdrawing my application. Well, I had never in my life had trouble writing a letter, you know, something always comes to my fingers, I’m not thinking about it, it is there on the paper. And, anyways, I got “dear sir” and that was as far as I went. Nothing, not a word would come, and so I decided I’d better do some praying about it and the Lord kept turning me to Psalm, oh what is it? 71:16? I think, somewhere in that vicinity. I’d have to look it up again to check the exact reference, but I will go in the strength of the Lord and I argued and argued and argued for nearly an hour, and finally I got up and tore up the letter and just let it be. Okay, if I am supposed to go I am supposed to go.” (252-273)

· she feels the Lord protected her many times over the course of her life: “But years later when it came back to my mind I thought the Lord was using the older man to protect me.” (1488-1490)

EVENTS IN LIFE ARE ORDERED BY THE LORD FOR MY GOOD:

· “Looking back at it now, I feel that what was important, given some of the problems that I had in my life at that time, it was the Lord’s way of keeping me too busy to dwell on the problems.” (50-54) “I really feel now, looking back that that was the way the Lord kept me sane.” (67-69)

· even bad times: “Even some of the bad times where I can see that you know, the Lord used, you know those bad times to strengthen me.” (1527-1530)

DEPEND ON THE LORD:

· “just for wisdom, and strength. Physical strength, definitely, because literally I don’t have very much physical strength at all.” (621-622) “But Lord, if you want
me to do this job, you will give me the strength, and he does, he gives me the strength for the day.” (632-635)

CONTENT:

- “I can honestly say that in spite of things that made me unhappy, I was content, as content as it was possible for a person to be, I think, in whatever place the Lord put me. So, that change has just been, like I say, it has just been gradual, yea, gradual strengthening.” (1049-1055)

THE WORLD IS AN EVIL AND NEGATIVE PLACE:

- “There is so much negative stuff going on in the world now, but I think young people have a tendency to be very easily discouraged by it. Young people? All of us, ha, ha. You know, about what is going on in the world and to try and keep your mind settled on things that are good and clean and positive, because there is just so much filth around.” (1143-1151)

J.4 Affective Colouring:

- Ginny is a dramatic story-teller. She related times when she has felt discouraged, but her faith in God seems to sustain her, and to prevent her mood from becoming extremely low.

J.5 Change:

SHYNESS:

- moves from being shy and withdrawn to outgoing and talkative

INFERIORITY:

- moves from feeling very inferior to being fairly confident, although she still struggles with feelings of inferiority.

MARITAL ATTITUDE CHANGE:

- “My dad just worshipped my mother and I guess that is why when I got married it was such a shock when I got into that different situation where women were nothing but dirt under the feet of a man and, or doormats.” (442-447)
CONFRONTATIONAL ABILITY CHANGE:

- “During that session of [church] meetings, there was a very distinct turning point because I literally, literally, in one of the services went under, came under Satanic attack, and it was the most terrifying experience I’ve ever had in my life, and he had to come down and literally plead the blood over me to deliver me from whatever it was that was attacking me at that particular point in time. But from then on, I’ve never been afraid to confront anybody on anything, you know.” (538-549)

ACTIVITY CHANGE:

- “That has definitely changed. The things that I do now that keep me busy now, I do because I enjoy doing them.” (494-496) (rather than to keep her sanity)

FAITH CHANGE:

- “Well, it has changed in the point that I have become so totally dependent on the Lord, in everything and for everything that I guess that is what keeps me from being afraid to try something new.” (577-581) “Well, some of the jobs that I get, I mean they absolutely scare the daylights out of me...I mean in the natural I would be absolutely petrified. And yet because it is something that I feel the Lord gives me to do, [I am able to do it].” (583-596) “Just for wisdom, and strength. Physical strength, definitely, because literally I don’t have very much physical strength at all.” (621-624)

- “No, just to be strengthened, really. Yea, and everything that happens to me just simply strengthens.” (955-958)

- “Just strengthened, actually, yes, yea. It has just been a gradual process of strengthening my dependence on the Lord, like when I left my husband I left him with nothing and when I came out here to, you know I had no family, nothing, and I used to sit down sometimes and sort of take a look at my life as though I was sitting on the outside looking at somebody else’s life and I can literally remember once...before I met my second husband, thinking, boy if I didn’t have the Lord you know, you haven’t got anything. I didn’t have money, I didn’t have anything, you know. And yet I never felt alone.” (990-1003)
MORE CONCERN FOR SENIORS ISSUES:

- "I guess because as I get older and becoming with more time of course, I am
  becoming more concerned more about issues that affect the seniors, with
  governments, like in the judicial system." (1255-1259)

MORE REMINISCENCE:

- "Sort of seeing how the Lord has taken me step by step, you know, through
  different experiences." (1439-1441)

- she finds it difficult to grieve the deaths of any of her family members because she
  believes she will see them again in heaven. She did not talk about her attitude
  toward her own death in the initial interview. In the feedback session, she stated:
  "My attitude toward death hasn’t changed....When it’s the Lord’s time for me to go,
  I’ll go as fast as I can. I have no fear of death."