

PARTICIPATION OF THE AGED IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Participation in voluntary activity is of much interest to social gerontologists and to others more directly concerned with action programs for the aged. Voluntary activity is generally considered to be an important mechanism for the personal well-being and social integration of the aged (Rose, 1960). A number of definitions of activity are used in research. Researchers who have focused upon the broad range of activities, including formal and informal social contacts, have reached conclusions similar to those who have limited their investigations to voluntary activity (Cutler, 1973). The direct relationship between formal and informal activity further supports voluntary activity as an index of participation in general (Axelrod, 1956; McKain, 1947).

Moreover, living longer and retiring earlier seem to foster interest in the value of voluntary involvement for the aged (Monk & Cryns, 1973). The Special Concerns Session of the 1971 White House Conference on Aging recommended establishing a national policy to encourage awareness of the significance of utilizing more fully the talents of older adults (White House Conference on Aging, 1971).

Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to identify factors believed to influence the participation of the aged in voluntary activity and to determine the life adjustment of the participant. The activity "theory" of aging implies that social activity is a correlate of successful adjustment to old age (Havighurst, 1961; Maddox, 1963; Vickery, 1972). The research reported here attempted to identify factors influencing social participation in the form of voluntary activity and to examine the relationship of these factors to successful adjustment in old age.

An examination of the somatic, physiological, and social disruptions in the life of the aged person constitutes a way of approaching an understanding of the aging process (Montgomery, 1965). Numerous reviews of problems of aging and critical periods of old age have been made (Neugarten, 1966). Major life disruptions, characteristic of older persons (Montgomery, 1965), have been identified as an independent variable for voluntary participation. It was believed that social status would help account for the amount of participation observed and provide information relevant to participation. Finally, in order to understand the relationship of life disruption and social status to participation, a study of the life satisfaction of aged persons according to social status and major life disruption seemed to be warranted.

Theoretical Framework

A major, well-known theory of the aging process is that of disengagement (Cumming & Henry, 1961). This theory states that society and the individual mutually, inevitably, universally, and gradually withdraw from each other to the advantage of older persons and to society. The theory is currently being questioned by a number of gerontologists, including Rose (Rose & Peterson, 1965). Rose has the following criticisms of the theory: disengagement is not inevitable and non-engagement in later years is simply a continuation of life-long social-psychological characteristic of some people; the engaged elderly, rather than the disengaged, are the ones who generally are happiest and have the greatest expressed life satisfaction; and disengagement as a loss of adult roles in the United States is within the context of the current social structure and social trends, and not universal for all time. While there are researchers who continue to employ certain aspects of the disengagement theory, the present investigator assumes on the basis of available evidence, that the activity theory is more promising in the pursuit of questions posed in the current study and chooses to review the activity theory of aging as a theoretical foundation for the present undertaking.

Proponents of the activity theory of successful aging contend that life satisfaction in old age is dependent upon opportunities to find substitutes for meaningful social roles and relationships of the middle adult years that have been progressively lost (Vickery,

1972). The social self emerges and is sustained in a basic way through interaction with others (Maddox, 1963). Through the loss of these "significant others" in old age, the elderly person's morale often decreases as he is deprived of those who can best reassure him that he is a worthy human being (Adams, 1971). The activity theory holds that activities are necessary to forestall deterioration of the individual (Montgomery, 1965).

With movement to higher levels of social interaction and increased diversity of social roles, the socially isolated older person shows an improvement in self-regarding attitudes and increase in life satisfaction (Birren, 1964; Carp, 1966). The more role support one receives, the more positive one's self-concept is likely to be (Cavan, 1962; Lemon et al, 1972). In terms of security, self-respect, and social orientation, the individual derives his 'social worth' from participation (Wittermans, 1967, p. 233).

Linden observed that there are indications that those persons who are withdrawn from family and social life are not contented. Some older persons seek to change this situation by becoming involved in community affairs (Tibbitts, 1954). According to Havighurst (1952), the needs for social recognition and social status are common to all people, needs which only can be provided by individuals who count in one's world.

A number of studies supports activity as a correlate of adjustment to old age. In 1963, Maddox observed a positive relationship between the morale and activity of older persons. According to Reichard et al (1962), attitudes of current life satisfaction,

attitudes toward growing old, and changes in adjustment in recent years indicate that those persons who adjust successfully to aging are more active socially than those who are unsuccessful in adjustment to aging. Social interaction is positively associated with life satisfaction and, with advanced age, this association is increased (Tobin & Neugarten, 1961).

Social, rather than innate, factors seem to form the basis for growing old successfully and for participating effectively in group life. The individual needs to find a suitable place in his society in which to age with gracefulness and usefulness and to participate meaningfully in human groups to the end of life (Simmons, 1952). Continued social participation offers the aged person opportunities for pleasure, achievement, and learning, to name a few (Havighurst, 1961). Through socialization, the individual is conditioned to seek satisfactions in social interaction and through participation, he acquires significance for himself as a person and is able to make his life more nearly meaningful. Participation thus becomes an end in itself, and the individual tends to support and sustain patterns of interaction which are perceived to be beneficial to him (Wittermans, 1967).

Rationale and Hypotheses

In the United States generally, participation in voluntary activity is increasing (Monk & Cryns, 1973; Wright & Hyman, 1971). Meanwhile, voluntary participation is negatively correlated with

patterns of disorderly career (Harris, 1969; Wilensky, 1961). Widowhood is a correlate of decreased participation (Blau, 1957; Pihlblad & Adams, 1972) as is retirement (Blau, 1957). Therefore, it was hypothesized (H_1), that the amount of participation in voluntary activity is inversely related to the amount of major life disruption.

Social status has been observed to be correlated positively with participation in voluntary activity (Cutler, 1973; Rothrock, 1968; Taietz & Larson, 1956; Webber, 1954). Wright and Hyman (1971), in an extensive survey of the literature, found that a trend toward increase in associational membership was not confined to the upper-economic strata. Rather, social participation especially increased from the mid-1950's to the early 1960's among the lower socio-economic status groups. Constraints to participation in certain types of voluntary activity (Harris, 1969), and a lack of adequate skills for voluntary work (Worthington, 1963) result in more limited voluntary activity among the lower social status groups. The relationship between life adjustment and social participation is inconclusive (Carp, 1968; Cutler, 1963; Lemon et al, 1972; Palmore, 1968; Jeffers & Nichols, 1961). It, therefore, seemed logical to hypothesize (H_2) that as voluntary activity participation increases, life satisfaction increases more for lower social status groups than for upper social status groups.

Among widows, life satisfaction is affected more by participation in formal organizations than by other social contacts (Pihlblad & Adams, 1972). Maladjustment to life situation is positively

correlated with life disruptions (Montgomery, 1965). It was, therefore, hypothesized (H₃) that life satisfaction is negatively correlated with major life disruptions.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses, stated in the null form, were tested:

1. There is no significant relationship between participation in voluntary activity and major life disruptions experienced within the previous two years.

2. There is no significant relationship between life satisfaction and participation in voluntary activity, when social status is held constant.

3. There is no significant relationship between life satisfaction and major life disruptions experienced within the previous two years.

Definition of Terms

In the present study, the following definitions were used:

1. Major life disruption: each subject's weighted scoring of major adverse life events experienced within the previous two years.

2. Participation in voluntary activity: each subject's weighted scoring on Chapin Social Participation Scale.

3. Life satisfaction: each subject's total score on the Life Satisfaction Index.

4. Social status: each subject's score on the Two Factor Index of Social Position.

5. Aged: age sixty and over, in agreement with the Older Americans Act of 1965.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The research relating to participation in voluntary activity has usually focused on demographic characteristics of the subjects. Studies have encompassed a variety of sample populations. Perhaps the most inclusive investigation was a National Sample Survey of 7,691 subjects aged 21 and over in the United States in the early 1950's by Wright and Hyman (1968) which was replicated in 1962 (Wright & Hyman, 1971). The major findings of that study include the following: voluntary association membership is not characteristic of the majority of Americans; a relatively small percentage of Americans belongs to two or more voluntary associations; membership is more characteristic of the white than black population; membership is more characteristic of Jews than Protestants, and more of Protestants than of Catholics; membership is more characteristic of urban and rural non-farm residents than of rural farm residents; membership does not appear to be related to a variety of situational factors, such as length of residency in the community, type of dwelling unit, or commuting time to work; membership is accompanied by a greater interest in public affairs; membership is associated with support for local charities; membership is related to family status, being higher for couples with children than for couples

without children. The present investigator will review published research on voluntary activity which she believes to have bearing on the present undertaking.

Participation in voluntary activity according to age is indicated by a curvilinear relationship between the two variables. According to studies of: 144 heads of households in two rural locality groups in Wake County, North Carolina (Mayo, 1951), 244 residents of a retirement community in California (McKain, 1947), 402 adults residing in one of the Midwestern plain states (Babchuk & Booth, 1969), and 1300 households in four rural communities in New York State (Taietz & Larson, 1956), social participation declines after age sixty. In a study of 201 middle-class women in three cities and two small towns in Kansas, Eitzen (1970) observed a slight, though not significant, relationship between age and participation. That study was in general agreement with other research findings where social class has not been considered.

Voluntary Activity Participation and Major Life Disruption

Harris (1969) studied the relationship between 'disorderly career' patterns and the extent of participation in voluntary associations. His subjects included 361 residents of Durham, North Carolina, of whom 221 were workers 21 to 64 years of age and of whom 140 were retirees 65 years of age or older. In this investigation, Harris found that for all age groups, persons who had reported disorderly career reported a decline of participation in voluntary associations.

In a sample of 678 white male laborers 21 to 55 years of age in greater Detroit, Wilensky (1961) discovered that men whose careers had been orderly had significantly stronger attachments to formal associations and to the community than did those who had disorderly career patterns.

In a study of 968 male and female subjects aged 60 and over in Elimira, New York and in an area of New York City, Blau (1957) has shown that retired and widowed persons have significantly fewer extensive social relationships than those who are employed or married. In a study of 1,551 noninstitutionalized married and widowed persons 65 and over who reside in 64 small towns of Missouri, Pihlblad and Adams (1972) discovered a small decrease in formal participation among widowed as compared to married persons. Taietz and Larson (1956), in a study of 1,300 household heads and homemakers in four rural communities in New York State, of whom 417 respondents were 65 years of age and over, found that participation in organizations decreases among the retired as compared to the employed.

Voluntary Activity Participation, Social Status, and Life Satisfaction

Cutler (1973) has found that voluntary participation is positively correlated with social status of 170 respondents aged 65 and over in Oberlin, California. He used a three-item analysis of voluntary participation of membership, involvement, and frequency of attending meetings, combined into an index of participation in voluntary activities. In his research, Cutler employed the Hollings-

head Two Factor Index of Social Position as a measure of social participation for the head of the household.

Rothrock (1968) discovered that membership in voluntary associations increases significantly with increases in education, occupation, and socio-economic status levels among 382 adult residents of Lawrence, Kansas. The analysis of voluntary activity provided a means of comparing studies of membership in voluntary associations, using different research methods. With the exception of those criteria which excluded church and union membership, use of various criteria of inclusiveness resulted only in an evenly distributed reduction of membership rates throughout the several social status categories.

Scott (1957), in his study of the participation of 232 persons ten years of age and over in voluntary associations, found that participation increases with increases in education and occupation levels. Participation also increases with higher social status as measured by Warner's Index of Status Characteristics. Participation was measured by the number of voluntary association memberships held by the individual.

Taietz and Larson (1956), referred to earlier, analyzed data collected from 215 male household heads 65 years of age and over who were interviewed in connection with a research project involving about 1,300 heads of households in four rural communities in New York State. Their analysis revealed a significantly positive relationship between social status and voluntary participation. Social status was determined by the male head's main occupation, and parti-

cipation was measured by the dichotomous "participates -- does not participate" in voluntary activities.

Webber (1954), in a study of 474 white retired residents of West Palm Beach and Orlando, Florida, found that membership in organizations increased with education. Participation was determined simply by the number of organizations in which the respondents held membership.

In recent years a number of studies have considered the possibility of a relationship between life adjustment score and voluntary participation scores of older persons. For example, Carp (1968) made a study of 352 older applicants for public housing, using the Burgess, Cavan, and Havighurst Attitude Scale. However, her data did not indicate a relationship between life adjustment and voluntary participation. Moreover, Cutler (1973) did not find a relationship between these two variables when he employed the A form of the Life Satisfaction Index in a study of 170 noninstitutionalized respondents aged 65 and over. Finally, Lemon and his associates (1972) failed to find a correlation when they used the B form of the Life Satisfaction Index in a study of 411 potential in-movers to a retirement community.

Palmore (1968), in a study of 127 noninstitutionalized residents of central North Carolina aged 70 and over, discovered that life adjustment and participation in voluntary activity are positively correlated, as measured by the Attitude Inventory, a scale which consists of 56 items relating to satisfaction with eight areas

of life. Jeffers and Nichols (1961), in a study of 251 community volunteers over 60 years of age, found a positive relationship between life adjustment and participation in voluntary activity.

Wright and Hyman (1968), in a study of 7,696 American adults drawn from National Sample Surveys in the mid-1950's, found membership in voluntary associations to be directly related to socioeconomic status. In a replicated 1962 study of the subjects, Wright and Hyman (1971) discovered an increase in voluntary membership to be greater for lower than for upper status individuals. The researchers employed five indices of social status, namely, family income, education, family's level of living, occupation of head of household, and home ownership.

Harris (1969), in a study of 361 working and retired adults in Durham, North Carolina, discovered that persons with lower prestige occupations presently or before retirement were restricted from participation in certain types of voluntary associations. Worthington (1963) has concluded that lack of adequate skills for voluntary work appears to be a partial explanation for decreased participation of lower social status groups.

Life Satisfaction and Major Life Disruptions

Pihlblad and Adams (1972), in a study of 151 noninstitutionalized widowed persons aged 65 and over residing in 64 small Missouri towns, found formal participation was significantly and positively related to a high life satisfaction score. Life satisfaction was measured

by the A form of the Havighurst Life Satisfaction Scale.

Phillips (1957), through analysis of data obtained from interviews with 968 noninstitutionalized individuals aged 60 and over residing in two cities in New York State, found that maladjustment to life is positively correlated with role changes. As an index of adjustment, he employed a dichotomized Guttman scale developed around the degree to which there was a patterned alignment between the individual's needs and rewards. Role changes were defined as loss of spouse, retirement, individual's perception of being treated differently because older, or reaching age of 70.

Montgomery (1965), in a study of 510 greater Philipsburg, Pennsylvania residents aged 65 and over, found the number of life disruptions to be negatively correlated with mental health ratings. A list of 13 events frequently occurring in the life of the aged individual comprised the measure of life disruption. Mental health was measured by a five-item Likert-type scale of health problems. Montgomery also found a positive relationship between mental health and morale, as measured by a seven-item morale scale developed by Kutner and associates (1956).

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Subjects

The subjects for the present study were older persons who were participating in the Nutrition Program sponsored through the State Office on Aging and administered by the New River Valley Planning District in Southwest Virginia. The Program was conducted in compliance with guidelines set forth in Title III of the Older Americans Act. At each of nine sites for the Nutrition Program throughout the District, a meal is served on or near the noon hour, Monday through Friday. Only those participants present at the site on any given day of testing were included in the study. Each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire (See Appendix). Subjects who were unable to read or write were assisted in completing the questionnaire by this writer and volunteers at the sites.

Permission to enter the Nutrition Program sites and distribute the questionnaires to the participants was obtained from Mrs. Mary Ellen Lloyd, Director of the Nutrition Program in the New River Community Planning District. Completed questionnaires were obtained from 100 participants. For a summary of subjects'

characteristics, see Tables I and II.

Instruments

Social class was determined by the Two-Factor Index of Social Position (Hollingshead, 1957). Voluntary activity participation was measured by Chapin's Social Participation Scale (Bonjean, Hill, and McLemore, 1967). Major Life Disruptions were assessed by a weighted scale, based upon the judgement of a panel of five experts in the fields of family stress, family counseling, and psychiatric nursing. Finally, life satisfaction was measured by the Life Satisfaction Index, developed by Neugarten, Sheldon, and Tobin (1961). The correlation coefficient of validity of this instrument was established at .64 (Neugarten et al, 1961), and reliability was established at .80 (Stinnett, Carter, and Montgomery, 1972).

Methodological Assumptions

The underlying assumptions of the present study were as follows:

1. Subjects participating in the Nutrition Program in the New River Community Planning District are more or less representative of an unisolated aged population by virtue of their participation in the project and minimum age requirement of 60.
2. Information recorded by the respondent is accurate,

based upon anonymity of the questionnaire and limited recall.

Analysis of Data

Responses to questionnaire items were coded, and hand-tabulated. Correlation coefficients were computed for hypothesized relationship of variables. In some instances chi square analyses were also made.

TABLE I

Marital Status, Race, Education, and Social Position
of Study Population

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Marital Status</u>			
Married	11	13	24
Widowed	11	46	57
Divorced	3	5	8
Separated	1	1	2
Single	4	5	9
<u>Total</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Race</u>			
White	24	56	80
Black	6	14	20
<u>Total</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Education</u>			
Less than 8th grade	16	22	38
8th grade	7	11	18
Some high school	2	13	15
Graduated from high school	2	7	9
Some college	1	11	12
Graduated from college	0	5	5
Some graduate work	2	1	3
<u>Total</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Social Position</u>			
I (Highest)	0	0	0
II	2	10	12
III	2	12	14
IV	6	11	17
V (Lowest)	20	37	57
<u>Total</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>100</u>

TABLE II

Type of Living Arrangement and Resident Community
of Study Population

<u>Type of Living Arrangement</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Live with spouse	11	11	22
Live alone	13	47	60
Live with relatives	6	10	16
Live with nonrelatives	0	2	2
Total	30	70	100
<u>Community</u>			
Blacksburg	5	1	6
Christiansburg	5	11	16
Dublin	1	5	6
Floyd	9	10	19
Narrows	0	10	10
Pearisburg	2	6	8
Pembroke	3	5	8
Pulaski	3	12	15
Radford	2	10	12
Total	30	70	100

CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

The three hypotheses investigated in the present study were concerned with the characteristics of the aged who participated in voluntary activity. Variables of participation in voluntary activity were compared with each other in order to determine the presence or absence of a relationship.

Hypothesis I: There is no significant relationship between voluntary activity participation and major life disruptions experienced within the previous two years.

An analysis of the data failed to warrant a rejection of this hypothesis. See Table III. This finding did not support the research by Blau (1957), Harris (1969), Pihlblad and Adams (1972), and Wilensky (1961), who indicate that specific events disrupting one's life in old age are correlated with decreased participation. While the list of major life disruptions used in the present study includes those events common to the aging process (Montgomery, 1965), retirement as a major life disruption was not included in this study.

Hypothesis II: There is no significant relationship between life satisfaction and voluntary activity participation, when social

TABLE III

Major Life Disruption and Social Participation

Social Participation Score	Major Life Disruption Score				Total
	0-50	51-150	151-250	251-500	
0 - 5	3	12	5	2	22
6 - 11	10	16	7	8	41
12 and above	9	11	12	5	37
Total	22	39	24	15	100

$r = -.123$

$\chi^2 = 6.029$

status is held constant.

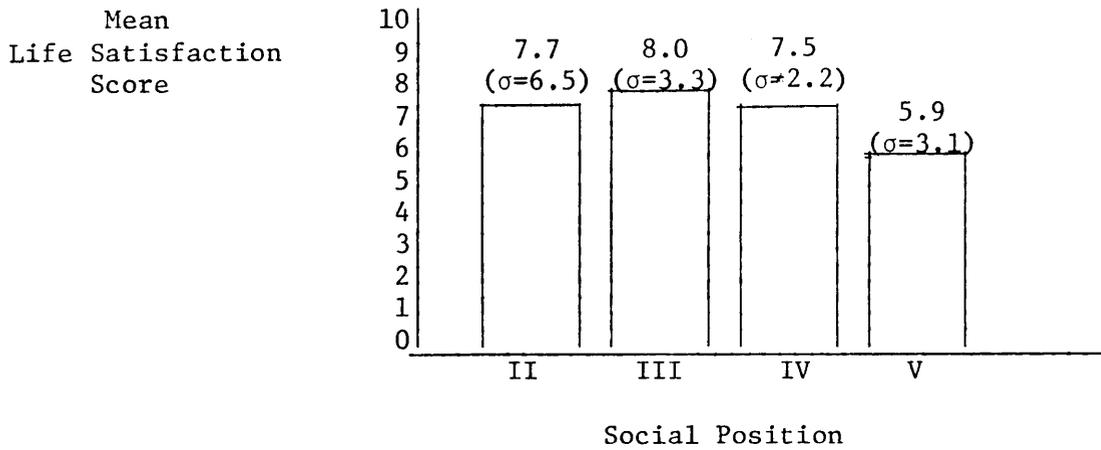
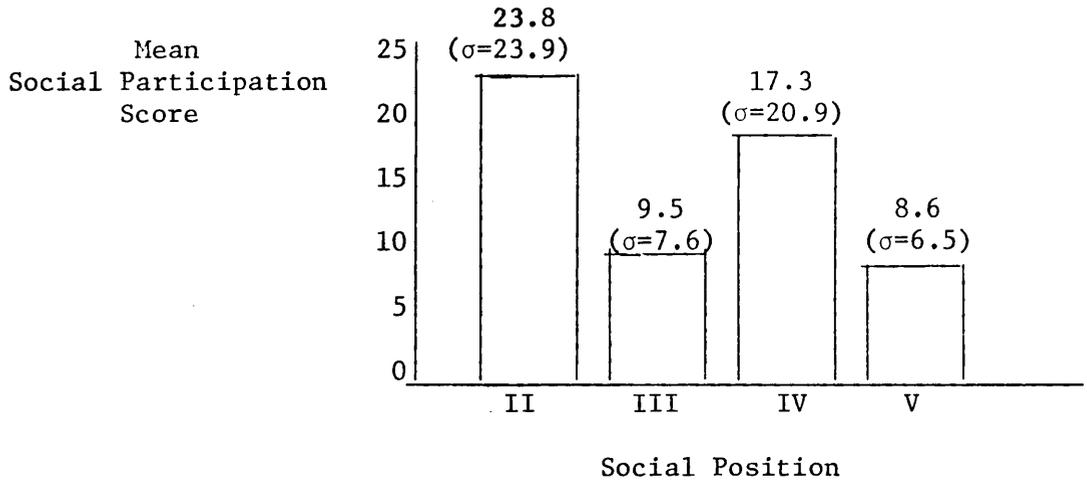
The results of the analysis showed no significant relationship between the two variables, when controlling for social class. Therefore, the hypothesis was not rejected. See Table IV. These data are in agreement with the findings of Carp (1968), Cutler (1973), and Lemon, Bengston and Peterson (1972), and are not in agreement with the findings of Palmore (1968) and Jeffers and Nichols (1961). The minimum age of 70 of Palmore's subjects, and the sample of "volunteers" in the case of Jeffers' and Nichols' study may account for a difference in study groups.

The data are supported by Cutler (1973), Rothrock (1968), Scott (1957), Taietz and Larson (1956), and Webber (1954), with the largest amount of social participation occurring among the highest social class grouping, and the smallest amount of social participation occurring among the lowest social class grouping. However, the large decrease in social participation in the second highest social class, followed by a sharp rise in the second lowest social class, is not supported by these former studies.

The data are not supported by the research findings of Harris (1969), and Worthington (1963), which revealed voluntary activity increased the life satisfaction for the lower social classes only. With large statistical variances among the social classes, an accurate measure of the correlation between social participation and life satisfaction is difficult to obtain.

TABLE IV

Social Participation, Life Satisfaction, and Social Position of Study Population



	<u>Social Position</u>			
	II	III	IV	V
r =	.739	.186	.325	.326

Hypothesis III: There is no significant relationship between life satisfaction and major life disruptions experienced within the previous two years.

From analysis of data in the present study, no significant correlation was found between the two variables. Therefore, the hypothesis was not rejected. See Table V. While Pihlblad and Adams (1972) found a higher degree of formal participation more conducive to high life satisfaction than other social contacts among widows, widowhood itself may account for decreased life satisfaction among those subjects. Role changes as defined by Phillips (1957) include a number of life disruptions, but a difference between those life changes and major life disruptions defined in the present study account for contradictory findings. Montgomery (1965) found an inverse relationship between the number of life disruptions and mental health ratings. The measure of life satisfaction used in the present study may be sufficiently different from mental health ratings to warrant contradictory findings.

Also, the method used in arriving at life satisfaction scores in which some subjects wrote their responses and others verbalized theirs to the interviewer may account for difference between respondents in their life satisfactions.

Limitations and Recommendations

The present study was limited to a select group of Nutrition

TABLE V
Major Life Disruption and Life Satisfaction

Life Satisfaction Score	Major Life Disruption Score				Total
	0-50	51-150	151-250	251-500	
0 - 5	7	16	8	5	36
6 - 8	7	12	10	7	36
9 - 13	8	11	6	3	28
Total	22	39	24	15	100

$r = -.037$
 $\chi^2 = 2.490$

Program participants in the New River Valley Planning District in Southwest Virginia. The findings cannot, therefore, be generalized to the aged population. Other limitations included the small sample and only those participants present at each Nutrition cite on a given day were questioned. Additional biases may have resulted from inconsistency in method of obtaining life satisfaction scores from respondents.

A larger study population might provide for a more precise statistical technique for studying social class differences between voluntary activity participants. A more extensively weighted listing of major life disruptions may provide future researchers with a more accurate instrument for measuring disruption commonly occurring in the lives of the aged. Finally, a closer examination of the activity theory may lead other researchers to study a population which is unisolated and varies in amounts of formal social activity, in order to measure more accurately the relationship of voluntary activity to life satisfaction and major life disruptions.

CHAPTER V

Summary

The present study hypothesized a positive relationship between voluntary activity participation and life satisfaction with control for social class. Inverse relationships between voluntary activity participation and major life disruptions, and between life satisfaction and life disruptions for the aged individual were also examined. None of the null hypotheses in the study were rejected.

Subjects for this investigation were participants in the Nutrition Program of the New River Valley Planning District in Southwest Virginia. The study population included 30 males and 70 females aged 60 and over. The subjects responded to questionnaires which elicited demographic information and information regarding their social activity, major life disruptions, and life satisfaction. Social participation was measured by Chapin's Social Participation Scale, major life disruptions were measured by a weighted scale based upon the judgement of a panel of five experts, and life satisfaction was measured by the Life Satisfaction Index developed by Neugarten and associates. Analysis of data included correlation coefficients and, in some cases, chi square computations. No significant relationships were found between the variables of the study.

Possible explanations for the absence of a significant relationship between the three variables include the following:

1. Retirement as a major life disruption per se was not included in the study.

2. Large statistical variances among the subjects in each social class made an accurate measure of correlations of variables difficult.

3. Those participants in the Nutrition Program may have provided subjects insufficiently varied in participation in voluntary activity to warrant adequate comparison of variables.

4. Inconsistency in method of collecting data through self-administered questionnaires and interviews may have accounted for inaccurate measure of variables.

5. Restricted sample size and location of study population did not permit a generalization of the research findings to the aged population.

Under most circumstances, the obvious theoretical implications of the present study would be that the activity theory is subject to question. However, due to methodological limitations of data collection and sample characteristics outlined above, it does not appear justifiable to question the theoretical implications.

A number of inferences regarding the activity correlate to life adjustment may be drawn, based upon the characteristics of the subjects in the present study. Fifty-six percent of them had eight years of schooling or less, and 57% were in the lowest of five social class categories. With a majority of lower-class subjects,

involvement in formal social activity may be at a minimum because of restriction from participation in certain types of voluntary activity (Harris, 1969), and lack of adequate skills for voluntary work (Worthington, 1963). Means for life satisfaction scores range from 8.0 in the next to the highest social class to 5.8 in the lowest social class, with an optimum life satisfaction score of 13. Neither figure indicates a high degree of life satisfaction among the subjects studied.

Subjects in the present study did not display a marked involvement in formal activity. While the variance in activity between the social positions were great, the means of social participation ranged from a high of 23.8 to a low of 8.6, indicating an overall low index of social involvement. Some research has indicated that the social involvement of persons living in mountain areas is informal contact with persons rather than participation in formal activity (Schwarzweiler, Brown, & Mangalam, 1971). The present investigator speculates that the activity involvement of the study population may be of an informal nature. A measure of informal and formal social activity might provide for more adequate implications of the activity theory to the study population.

These findings suggest that those participants in the Nutrition Program, while receiving social contacts and nutritious meals through the daily program, are not receiving reinforcement for participation in voluntary activity nor displaying a higher life satisfaction through the program. The Nutrition Program extends an average of approximately two hours daily, with the serving of

meals and planned social activity. Persons of the community who are available for participation in the Program are likely to be individuals without previous commitments. Therefore, the participants were a fairly homogeneous group of uninvolved citizens. With the exception of one center that opened in November of 1973, the Nutrition Program center opened in January of 1974. Because of the recent genesis of the program in the New River Community, an indication of the encouragement toward successful adjustment to aging fostered by the program leaders and social activity found there may not be observed at the present time.

What possible implications do the findings of the present study have for community leaders and social gerontologists interested in identifying characteristics of the aged individual successfully adapting to the aging process? Community leaders who design programs to meet the social needs of the elderly seem to proceed on the assumption that involvement by the individual contributes significantly to the individual's psychological well-being. Future researchers, social gerontologists, and community leaders might scrutinize more carefully the types of elderly individuals included in the pool of perspective participants in voluntary activity. Consideration of characteristics of the population involved, such as social class, education, and nature of current social contacts, should be helpful in recognizing the importance of increased involvement in voluntary activity to increased life satisfaction.

Future researchers might consider limitations of the present study in order to better measure the correlates of participation

in voluntary activity. Too, a more explicit measure of participation should be developed. Community leaders in various cities are considering the feasibility of utilizing the services of aged persons as volunteers in social agencies (Lambert et al, 1964; Rosenblatt, 1966). Social agencies will then have added resources in manpower with which to provide needed services (Worthington, 1963). Research on additional correlates of participation of the aged in voluntary activity will assist the activity leader in identifying the characteristics of candidates for voluntary activity participation, as well as help social gerontologists recognize characteristics of the aged individual.

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APPENDIX

VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: This is not a "test." There are no right or wrong answers. Just respond to the questions in the way you, yourself, feel about them. Please do not write your name on the paper. Thank you for your help.

Carolyn V. Cable
MHFD Graduate Student, VPI&SU

1. Are You: (check one)

- married
- widowed
- divorced
- separated from husband (wife)
- single

2. Do you have any grandchildren? yes no

3. At present, do you: (please check one)

- live with your husband (wife)
- live alone
- live with relatives
- live with nonrelatives

4. Who is the head of the household in which you now live?

- myself
- my husband (wife)
- other (Please explain relationship to you _____)

5. Are you: male female

6. Are you: white nonwhite

7. How far did you go in school? (check one)

- less than 8th grade
- 8th grade
- some high school, but did not graduate
- graduated from high school
- some college
- graduated from college
- some graduate work
- graduate degree

8. How far did the head of your household go in school? (If you are the head, do not answer this question).

- less than 8th grade
- 8th grade
- some high school, but did not graduate
- graduated from high school
- some college
- graduated from college
- some graduate work
- graduate degree

9. What is, or used to be, the occupation of the present head of the household?

_____.

10. Now I want to ask you about some matters that might have happened to you during 1972 and 1973. Please check all that apply to you.

- I changed the place where I lived
- A close relative moved away
- A close friend moved away
- I have been hard up for money
- I experienced serious illness or injury
- My husband (or wife) experienced serious illness or injury
- A close relative experienced serious illness or injury
- I lost a close friend
- I lost a close relative
- I lost my husband (or wife)

11. I would like to know something about the organizations you belong to. Below is a list of organizations. Please note the organizations of which you are a member in the chart below, and then check the boxes on the same line that apply to your relationship with that organization

Name of Organization	Member	Attend Regularly	Make Financial Contribution	Committee Member	Hold Office
1. Church					
American Association					
2. of Retired Persons					
3. Eastern Star					
4. Mason					
5. Sr. Citizens Club					
National Retired					
6. Teachers Association					
7. Civic Club					
8. Lodge					
9. Garden Club					
10. Sewing Club					
Please list others.					
11. _____					
12. _____					
13. _____					
14. _____					
15. _____					

12. Please check the response that is closest to the way you feel about the statement.

a. As I grow older, things seem better than I thought they would be.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

b. I have gotten more of the breaks in life than most of the people I know.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

c. This is the dreariest time of my life.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

d. I am just as happy as when I was young.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

e. These are the best years of my life.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

f. Most of the things I do are boring and monotonous.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

g. The things I do are as interesting to me as they ever were.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

h. As I look back on my life, I am fairly well satisfied.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

i. I have made plans for things I will be doing a month or a year from now.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

j. When I think back over my life, I did not get most of the important things I wanted.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

k. Compared to other people, I get down in the dumps too often.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

l. I have gotten pretty much what I expected out of life.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

m. In spite of what people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better.

_____ agree _____ undecided _____ disagree

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your help.

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PARTICIPATION OF THE AGED IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY

by

Carolyn V. Cable

(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of the research was to identify factors influencing participation of the aged in voluntary activity and to determine life adjustment of the participant. It was hypothesized that an inverse relationship exists between voluntary activity and major life disruptions, as voluntary activity participation increases, life satisfaction increases more for lower status groups than for upper status groups, and life satisfaction is negatively correlated with major life disruptions.

The data were collected from a group of 100 participants in the Nutrition Program in the New River Valley Planning District in Southwest Virginia. Participation in voluntary activity was measured by Chapin's Social Participation Scale, Major Life Disruptions were assessed by a weighted judgement of experts, Social Class was determined by the Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Position, and Life Satisfaction was measured by the Life Satisfaction Index.

The null hypotheses were not rejected, when tested by chi square and correlation coefficients. Methodological limitations and variances in the study population may account for failure of the results to support the hypotheses of the study. An explicit measure of participation including both formal and informal activity involvement as well as identification of additional characteristics of participants in voluntary activity could be the subject of future investigations,