

Health, Spirituality & Environmental Concern: Older Women's Perspectives on the Natural Environment

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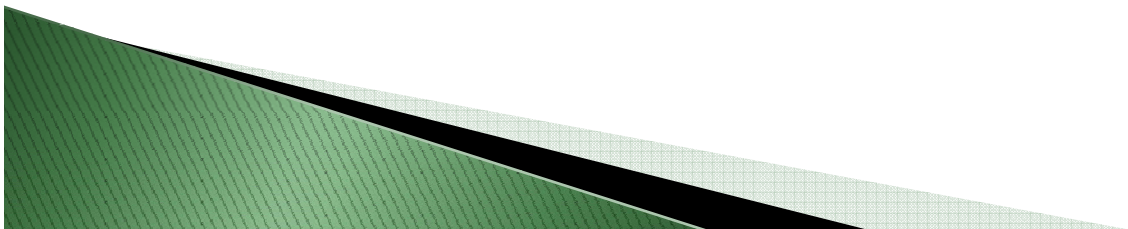
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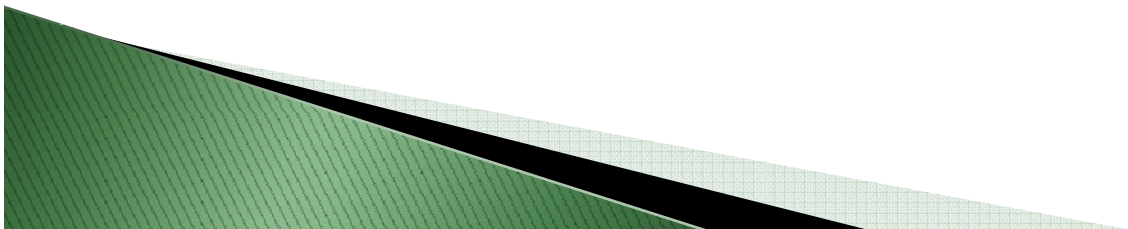
Background

- ▶ Empirical reports sparse, but on the rise
- ▶ Four broad areas of interest
 - Housing
 - Health
 - Therapy
 - Civic Engagement



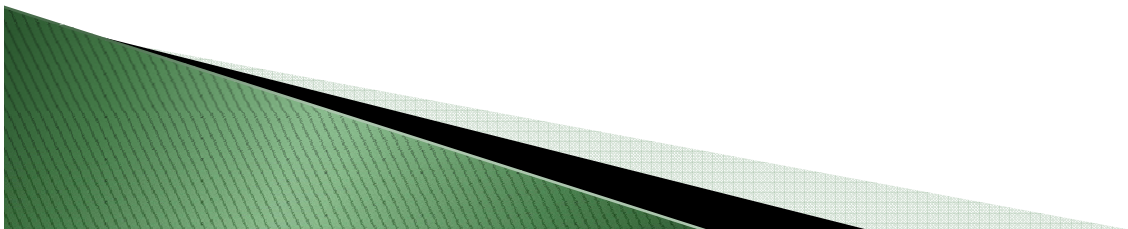
Research Questions

1. What is the importance of nature in the daily lives of older women?
2. What concerns, if any, do older women have in relation to the health of the natural environment?



Theoretical Frameworks

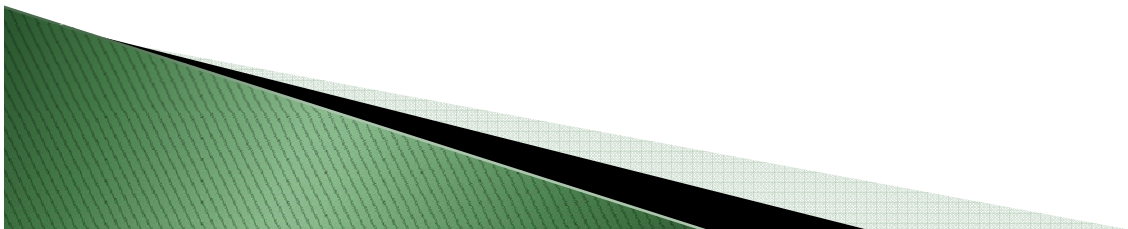
- ▶ Life Course theory
- ▶ Eco-feminism
 - Investigates social inequality
 - Unites environmentalism and feminism
 - Patriarchy oppresses women and nature
 - Interconnection: gender, race, class, and nature
 - Achieve sustainable community development



Methods

Data Collection

- ▶ Larger study on rural older women's health
- ▶ Face-to-face interviews in women's homes
- ▶ 5 nature specific, open-ended questions
- ▶ Interviews transcribed verbatim and verified by researchers



Methods

Sample Demographics (N=34)

Mean age 78 (71 to 91)

Caucasian (100%)

Living Alone (50%)

Income:

9 < \$1,000/mo.

13 - \$1,000-\$2000/mo.

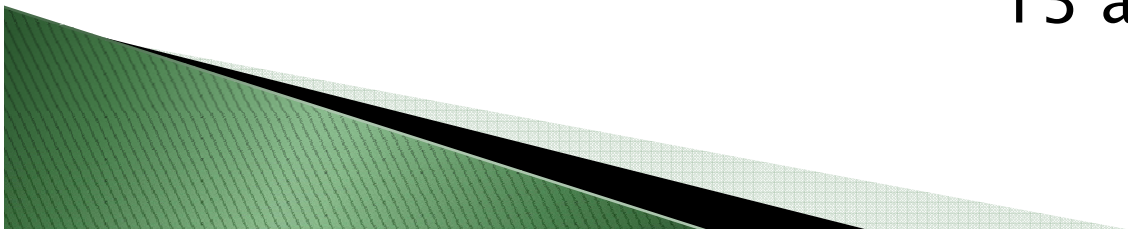
12 > \$2000/mo.

Education:

4 < HS

17 HS diplomas/vocation

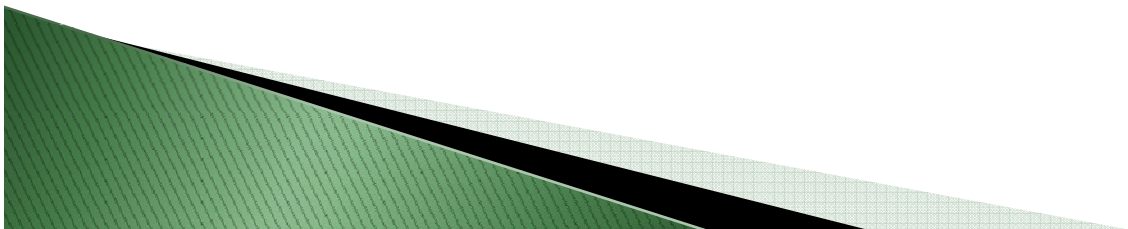
13 at least some college



Methods

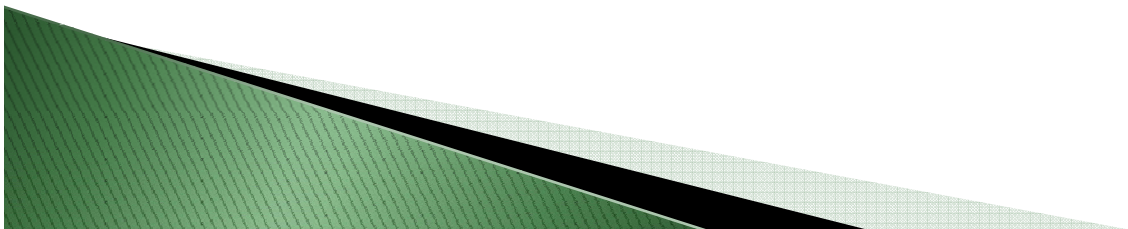
Qualitative Analysis

- ▶ Open coding
- ▶ Broad themes
- ▶ Coding scheme
- ▶ Consensus



Major Themes

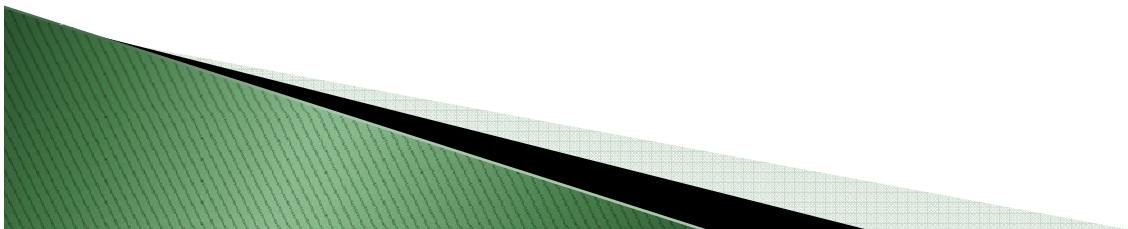
- ▶ Importance of Nature
- ▶ Defining Nature
- ▶ Connection to God
- ▶ Nature Related Behaviors
- ▶ Emotions/Knowledge
- ▶ Nature Trajectory
- ▶ Concerns



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Health,
Spirituality, &
Environmental
Concern



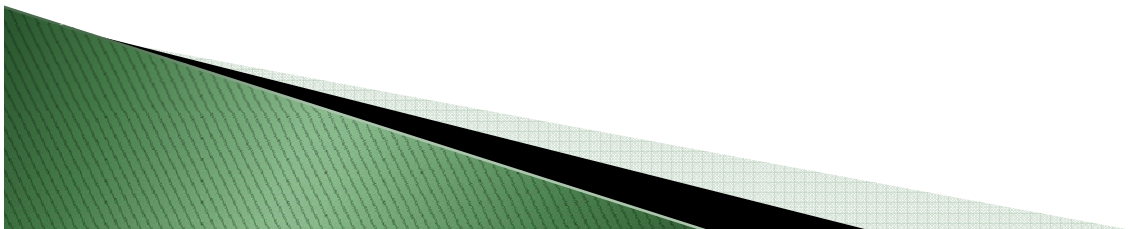
Health

▶ Sustenance & Survival

- Dependence on natural environment for food, water, and air.

*If you don't take care of it,
it don't take care of you*

*Well you have to have water
and you have to have land to
grow food and so I think for
the mere existence of the
human race as well as the animals*

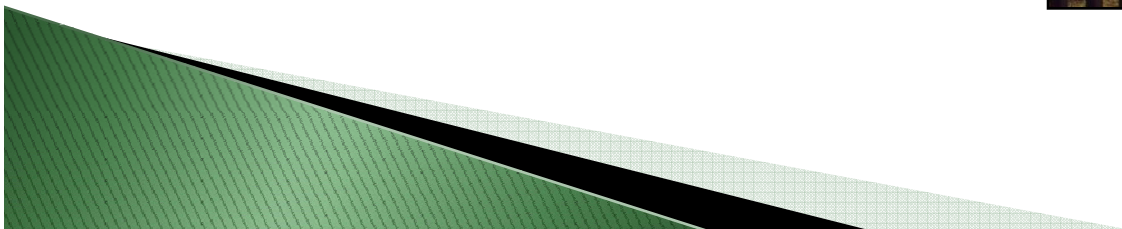
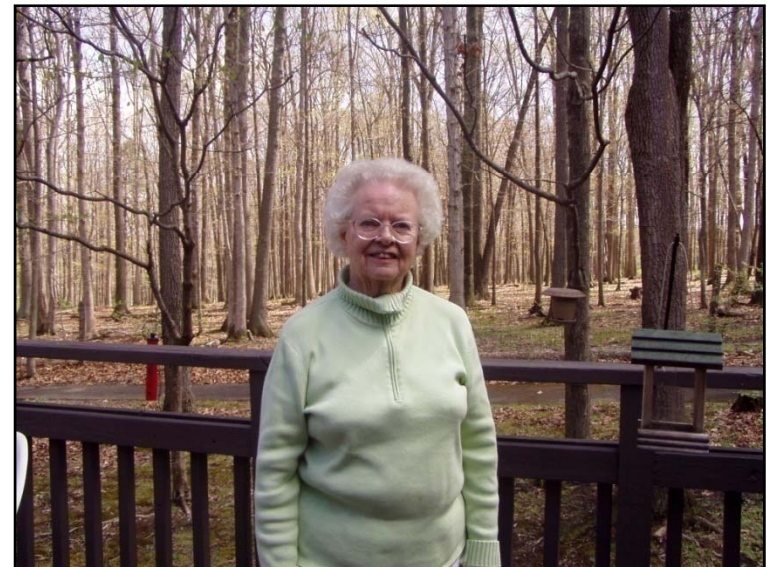


Health

▶ Physical & Psychological

- Nature effected physical comfort, mood, and energy level. Pleasure, relaxation, and sensory stimulation rejuvenated and restored the women.

Every morning I can get up and look out and see the beauties of nature, breathe the fresh air and know that we are free to do it.

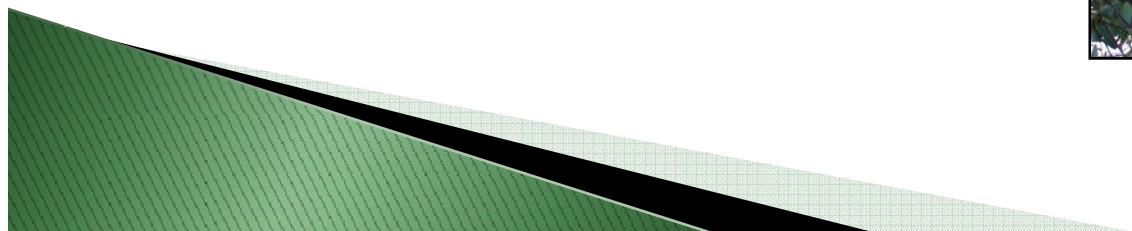
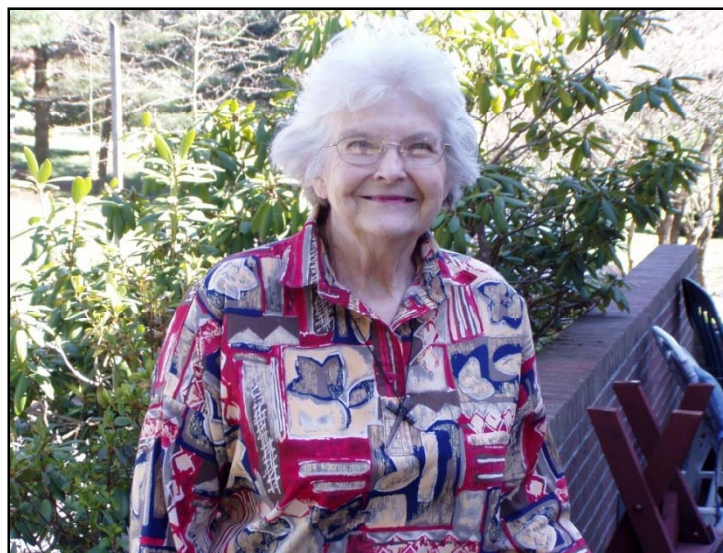


Spiritual Connection

- ▶ Nature is God's Creation

Well, now sometimes you can get out there and you get to thinking about God created this, and God created that and how he made so many different flowers and things.

I think as you get older you feel closer to nature and God and appreciate it more.

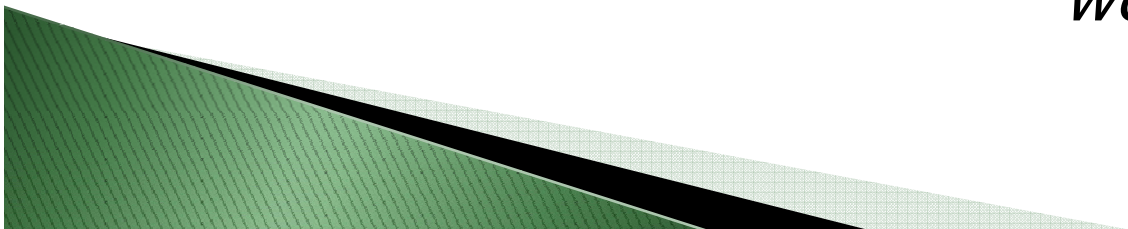


Spiritual Connection

- ▶ We are God's stewards



God made this world and He gave it to us, our stewardship is that we take care of it for future generations; our grandchildren and great grandchildren are not going to have a decent place to live if we don't.



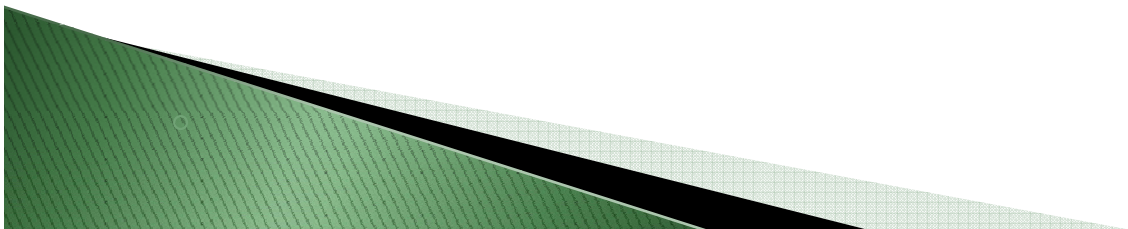
Environmental Concerns

▶ Health

It bothers me the way we use pesticides and Clorox for instance that goes into the ground... we used to have cattle on the farm and you vaccinate them for this and that, well you think that goes into the meat we eat.

▶ Conservation & Preservation

I think it should be preserved for coming generations and this thing of you know just building on every little inch of ground and taking mountains and you know what are children who come after us gonna have?



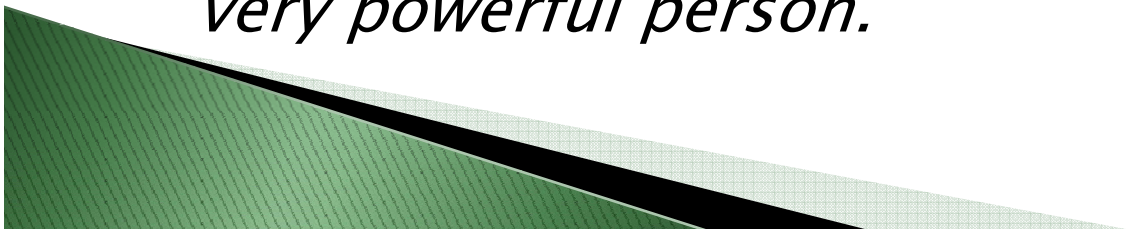
Environmental Concerns

- ▶ Social & Political Climate

The whole world is too involved in the wrong endeavors. It all boils down to money and power and it ought'n to be that way. It ought to be where it's people helping people all over the world.

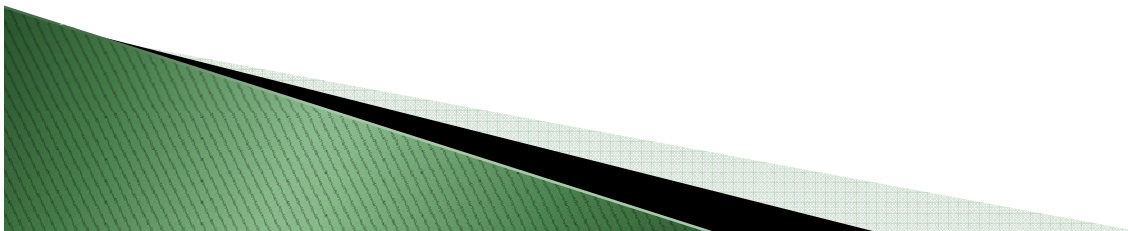
- ▶ Agency: Helpless and Hopeful

There's nothing I can really do except shoot off my mouth, and that's not very important. I think people should be responsible for the global, but they can't do too much about it unless you are a very powerful person.



Conclusions

- ▶ Emphasized the connection between the health of the natural environment and the health and well being of present and future generations.
- ▶ Highlighted their spiritual beliefs about nature and their duty to preserve it.
- ▶ Ultimate concern centered on the preservation of a sacred creation that sustains all life.
- ▶ Felt powerless to effect change



Implications

- ▶ Provide reliable and accessible information about the state of the natural environment and what role individuals can play in sustaining it.
- ▶ Empower older women by creating accessible opportunities for them to contribute to efforts with positive environmental outcomes.
- ▶ As stewards of God's creation, opportunities would allow them to actualize generativity in later life.

