

**Using a Life History Approach to Explore the Identity of a Woman
Diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease: The Life of Mary**

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Family and Child Development

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May 13, 1999
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Alzheimer's Disease, Life Story, Qualitative

USING A LIFE HISTORY APPROACH TO EXPLORE THE IDENTITY OF A WOMAN
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(ABSTRACT)

This study utilized life history as a methodological tool to explore the identity formation of Mary, a woman in her eighties who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The results of this study showed that Mary's sense of self was greatly influenced by her childhood experiences. Five predominate themes emerged in the interview process: Mary's admiration for her father, her willingness to share wisdom, her career as a beautician, her role as a mother, and her devotion as a wife. The Dynamical Identity Model was constructed to help further illustrate Mary's identity development and the model served as a basis to describe possible outcomes in Mary's life, as a woman diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. Her story reveals that Mary has a wonderful disposition about life and, even though she was diagnosed with this disease, she does not perceive the disease as threatening.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to Mary and her family. Simply put, without you Mary, there would be no story. I thank you from the depths of heart for not only taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk to me, but for also sharing your wisdom. I would like to thank your husband and your children for helping to guide me throughout this process and giving me the opportunity to make this study a reality.

Next, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Andy Stremmel. Dr. Stremmel, you served as a profound inspiration for this entire process. I thank you for lending your books (which you will get back), lending your thoughts (that helped create this study), and lending your time (a precious commodity I know you hold dear).

Dr. Roberto, I thank you for giving me insights and always pointing me towards the right direction. Thank you for being patient with me and for your thoughts about this entire process.

Dr. Fu, I thank you for your kind words of encouragement and for taking care of me. Thank you for letting me know that your office door is always open and that you are only a phone call away. Also, thank you for gentle nudges to get me to start this study.

I would also like to thank Shirley Painter for her help in introducing me to Mary's family and allowing me to conduct my interviews in adult day services. I appreciate all the time and effort that you so willingly gave me, that created the momentum for starting this study.

To Kathy Surface, I express my sincerest gratitude. Thank you for always offering to help and for 'checking in' on me. Thank you Kathy for always listening to my grumbles and never complaining.

Finally, I would like to thank my grandmother, Florence Hawkins. I wish you could be here now, but I know you would be proud of me. Thank you grandma for proving to me that not 'old' people are the same, and that life after 65 does exist. It's because if you that I am in doing what I love best, talking to older adults.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as a story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are *lived* by the stories of our race and place. It is this enveloping and constituting function of stories that is especially important to sense more fully. We are, each of us, locations where the stories of our place become partially tellable. (Mair, 1988, p. 127).

The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the aging process by co-constructing the story of Mary's life. Mary is a woman in her late seventies, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and mild depression approximately four years ago. Ever since I was first introduced to her in May of 1997, I have always found her to be an extraordinary woman, who exhibits an unusually high amount of charisma and an eagerness to share stories about her youth. During the past year when I interacted with Mary, I always enjoyed listening to her stories and often wondered how she became so candid and introspective about her life. I also wondered about the underlining qualities in her life, which helped her focus on the positive aspects about life. Like most people I know, Mary has her good days and bad, but never once has seemed disgruntled or discouraged because she is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

These interactions and my own introspections helped form the basis of this research, which focuses on Mary's ability to reflect on her life. Specifically, I wanted to explore the concept of how she sees herself as a person diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. I wanted to focus on her identity development and the processes that she went through in early life that helped shape her and guide her to become the person that she is today. I was interested in her thoughts and feelings as an older adult undergoing both a normative aging process and a non-normative aging process. Also, I wanted to explore the manner in which she sees herself today in her various roles (i.e. as a mother, a wife, etc.) and to relate these roles to her childhood. Finally, I was interested in gaining a better insight into Mary's life so I can share our study with her with other people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Perhaps those people may read her story and reflect about their own lives as they enter into the unknown realms of a person living with Alzheimer's disease.

To create this story, I used a series of guided interviews and asked Mary key questions about her past, present and future. This process allowed me not only the opportunity to help her construct her story, but it also gave me insights that helped me interpret and develop it into a meaningful narrative. This journey was fairly complex process, but it was an adventure, filled with twists and turns, and with joy and new clarity.

In collecting a person's narrative, it is difficult to speculate about a person's life story without having lived that life. Therefore, I utilized the life story (or life history) approach, a qualitative approach specifically designed to help researchers understand the in-depth and comprehensive meanings in people's lives. Specifically, this approach enabled me to gain a complete and holistic perspective of Mary's life. In addition, this particular methodology is specifically designed to help investigators share people's lives with others (Atkinson, 1998).

Atkinson (1998) notes that life stories are a key concept for older adults as they develop a linkage between generations and establish integrity in late life. Atkinson and Butler, Lewis, and Sunderland (1998) state that life stories are essential for people to gain a complete understanding of life. Butler et al., believe that life histories can help older adults "uncover and stabilize one's past selfhood" (p. 355) and they provide a method for older adults to reminiscence and orally express their lives. Atkinson further states that life histories can benefit older adults by "maintaining continuity with the past, expressing a commitment to the present, and clarifying the meaning of life in the future" (pp. 17-18). Moreover, Viney (1995) claims that life stories give the teller a sense of power. This sense of power is useful for older adults when experiencing any traumatic life events, because it helps people establish a sense of self-worth, as well as helps older adults feel needed by subsequent generations.

Very few researchers have utilized the life history approach methodology to study people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. It is accurate to say that this methodological technique is relatively new to the field of gerontology. However, this technique as a whole is not new to the realm of social sciences. Educational researchers have often used the life history approach as a way to illustrate "life's meaning and the role of caring for persons and how important it is for the teacher-researcher to take this quest..." (Atkinson, p. 17, 1998). Also, this technique has been quite popular in the field of sociology (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For example, researchers from the Chicago school used this technique in their ethnographic approaches in the 1920's and 1930's to study immigrants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In chapter two, I address the literature associated with identity development and the life history approach by providing an analysis of the information that has applied life history to the onset of Alzheimer's disease. In the next section though, I reflect on my first experiences with Mary and the overall emergence of this study.

The Journey Begins

My original intentions for conducting research focused on the intergenerational exchanges between older adults at the Virginia Tech Adult Day Services and preschool children at the Child Development Laboratory at Virginia Tech. Over the course of three semesters, I videotaped a variety of intergenerational activities within the adult day services setting, hoping to find a research question related to my interests. During that time period, I recorded preliminary field notes about each activity in general and the overall involvement that the adult participants had in each of the sessions. My evaluations often included informal interviews with staff members in both adult day services and the lab school in which I probed the people about their views and concerns about intergenerational programming.

I slowly began to realize that intergenerational research may be problematic in the adult day services and the child lab school. First, I had several questions pertaining to the measurement of attitudes exhibited by impaired older adults and preschool children. Second, I noticed that the best scenarios for conducting intergenerational programs were those that focused on small groups and 'informal' activities. My preliminary data suggested that the larger and thoroughly planned activities between adult day services and the lab school tended to create higher amounts of disorganization and less interactions. This phenomena was observed across various group participants, group activities, and differing time settings.

To address this level of disorganization, I encouraged the staff members to shift the intergenerational activities to smaller groups. Once we started conducting intergenerational activities in small group settings, I noticed that Mary always expressed the greatest amount of desire to interact with the children. Over a period of time, the group dynamics became more refined. I also noticed that Mary kept talking about the children and the influence that various children had in her life. Although she never stated that she had “redefined” her role in adult services in terms of the activities she participated in with the children, I deduced that her involvement in these activities allowed her to view herself as the children’s teacher. Seeing how one person benefited so greatly from a small group interaction helped me reshape my ideas for finding a research question. Rather than focus my research on intergenerational exchanges between the children and adults, I decided to shift my focus on just Mary. The more I interacted with her, the more I was fascinated to see her engage in activities and readily tackle new situations. In all honesty, I did not know that Mary was diagnosed with mild depression, until I consulted the adult day services staff. In fact, I still question the diagnoses for depression, because of her extreme positive outlook about life.

The Research Problem

Although the research on Alzheimer’s disease is quite extensive, it is limited in several domains. First, many researchers have noted that the area of aging research in general has often lacked in qualitative inquiry, with the research domain in Alzheimer’s disease being no exception (Gubrium, 1988; Hendricks, 1996). Second, though it may provide rich and descriptive data about the significance attributed to one’s life, the life history approach, is not a very common method-ological tool in current aging research. Atkinson (1998) claims that the popularity of using this approach has increased this past decade, however, he notes that the lack of published research for this particular tool is rather simple: life histories are very comprehensive in nature and few journals are willing to print complete life stories of people. Therefore, many of the life histories in print are either book chapters or complete books. Even so, for reasons stated earlier, this methodology can significantly contribute to the literature base in aging; particularly, in relation to identity development.

The concept of identity development has not been applied in much of the Alzheimer's research. Many reasons exist for the lack of this application. First, Alzheimer's disease research has been relatively ignored until the 1970's, and so much of the research has focused on etiology of the disease. Second, the concept of identity development is considered to be qualitative in nature (McAdams, 1993). Therefore, much of the research in this area has been relatively theoretical as opposed to empirical.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the comprehensive nature of this study, I used a pluralistic approach in drawing from and integrating various developmental theories, including Erikson's theory of identity development and the theoretical constructs associated with symbolic interactionism. In addition, I incorporated the notion of grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) as it relates to the life history methodology. I used the grounded theory as the basis of my theoretical stance, with implications from Eriksonian identity theory, symbolic interactionism, and psychohistory. These theoretical approaches helped me to construct my Dynamical Identity Model as discussed in chapter two.

Identity Development

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development stated that the emergence of identity "bridges the stages of childhood when the bodily self and the parental images are given their cultural connotations; and it bridges the stage of young adulthood, when a variety of social roles become available" (p. 235). From this passage, Erikson accounts for vital importance that identity plays in the course of human development. Erikson lists identity in the fifth stage of his model in regards to the life cycle (Erikson, 1964). Although he originally used identity as only the major transition point from adolescence to adulthood, Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986) further extrapolated the role of identity development to later life, expanding the importance of identity in relation to it to the achievement of balance in one's life, as one reflects upon his/her life in the last stage of ego integrity. Erikson et al. (1986) claim that identity is a necessary process in establishing a positive outcome during the life review process. Erikson's earlier works that focused on in-depth life histories, used "extraordinary" people as the basis for his observations. Erikson (1968), perhaps erroneously, believed that extraordinary people, such as famous playwrights, leaders, and politicians, tend to be more self-perceptive than the average

person. Hence, in Erikson's own works, he tended to offer an analysis on people such as Ghandi, Hitler, Martin Luther; but, he never offered in-depth insights on "ordinary" people, besides applying them to his general psychosocial theory.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction is another core perspective related to the gathering of life histories. Symbolic interactionism has its roots in sociology and the interactions that people have within society (Cox 1994; Matcha, 1997). The theory of symbolic interaction has three major constructs as described by Blumer (1969):

1. Human beings act and react toward objects based on the meanings that they have attributed to them
2. These meanings are formulated through social interaction
3. Meanings can be modified and are modified through experience

Symbolic interactionists believe that humans create, communicate, and interact through the use of symbols (Matcha, 1997). Through the process of interaction and interpretation of these symbols, human society is formed (Match, 1997). Blumer (1969) and Hendricks (1996) further claim that people are conscious actors in a world where situations and events are constantly taking place and people are constantly adapting to these events in an effort to understand them better.

Another key point of the symbolic interactionist perspective is the emphasis on "human capacity for *socially* constructing reality (Kart, 1997, p. 212). Kart (1997) and Cox (1994) state that symbolic interaction can be useful in the study of older adults in a variety of ways. Kart (1997) claims that researchers can investigate the importance and amount of change in both the social and symbolic worlds of aging. Further, Kart (1997) claims that using a life review can help facilitate our understanding of the world from an older adult's vantage point.

Grounded theory

The final theoretical concept that I would like to address in terms of life history is the notion of grounded theory. Grounded theory was first introduced by Glasser and Strauss in 1967 (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Glasser and Strauss (1967) believe that theories can be generated from a systematic collection of data. The major purpose of the grounded theory approach is to offer an alternative solution (or theory) to help explain the complexities within the social sciences

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Further, grounded theory “ seeks out not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to challenging conditions and to the consequences of their actions” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5). Glasser and Strauss (1967) suggest that the data collection process and data analysis should occur simultaneously, making the interpretation and gathering of data more complete and systematic.

The Pluralistic Approach

In sum, the current research integrates these theories to examine Mary’s life, especially her identity development and the impact that Alzheimer’s disease may have on this development. To help guide my interpretations of identity, I relied on Erikson’s psychosocial theory. In particular, I focused on the Eriksonian concepts of identity development and integrity, when discussing the major themes in Mary’s life. Essentially, the symbolic interaction perspective was the basis for interpreting the spoken narrative that Mary shared with me. Symbolic interactionists believe that people construct their realities through the interaction with other people. Therefore, during our conversations, Mary would create a story based from the questions that I asked. There were times when the stories addressed the questions directly, but there were other instances when the questions were left unanswered. Finally, the grounded theory approach enabled me to use a ‘funnel’ approach when gathering data. Essentially, the grounded theory method endorses data gathering and analysis as a continuous process. Grounded theory allowed me the opportunity to actively explore various facets in Mary’s life without adhering to a rigid guideline. Also, grounded theory allowed me to construct questions and future interviews by reading previous transcripts.

In addition to using the before mentioned theories, I combined Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model and dynamic systems theory to create my own model on identity. My model, the Dynamical Identity Model, accounts for this pluralistic approach, and utilizes the life history method as a means to test my assumptions. The next chapter discusses the Dynamical Identity Model in greater detail.

Assumptions

This study forced me to make several key assumptions. First, I assumed that the information that Mary provided me was what she believed to be the truth. Second, this study relied on the assumption that people can alter and shape their sense of self when interacting with others. The interviews were not conducted in a vacuum, and there were times when outside

events (and even the simple fact of my own presence) impacted the manner in which Mary shared her story. Third, I believe that Mary was willing and able to adequately communicate her thoughts and feelings. This assumption is critical, especially considering that she has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Finally, I assumed that Mary's past experiences played a fundamental role in her assessment of the present and her beliefs of her future. In chapter five I address this assumption further, as I talk about the recurrent themes that emerged while gathering her life story. I believe that it is important to state these assumptions, because often times, our assumptions are nothing more than a manner of simple interpretation. These assumptions helped guide me when conducting the analysis segment of this study and they helped me gain a better perspective of Mary's life as a whole.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to gain a better insight on what it means to be an older adult diagnosed with probable Alzheimer's disease. I chose the life history methodological approach as the basis for my journey into Mary's life, because it enabled me to collect a holistic and qualitative account of Mary's life (Atkinson, 1998). This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Mary perceive herself today, as a woman diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease?
2. What events from her childhood have lead to the person who she is today?
3. What are Mary's perceptions of the present and future, and how did she formulate these perceptions?

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In this chapter, I present an overview of Alzheimer's disease, then I address the origins of the life story approach. I conclude the chapter by discussing existing studies in gerontology that use this approach.

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is an organic brain dysfunction with no specific etiology. It is one of the most common types of brain disorders of people over the age of 65 years (Butler, et al., 1998; Holstein, 1997; Perlmutter & Hall, 1992) and it is "the most common form of progressive, degenerative, and fatal dementia, accounting for as many as 70% of all cases of dementia" (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 332). The disease typically "progresses through stages from mild memory loss, through significant cognitive impairment, to very serious confusion and the loss of ability to handle dressing, bathing, or other activities of daily living" (Moody, 1994, p.14). It is estimated that 2 to 4% of all people over the age of 65 years suffer from Alzheimer's disease, with an increased likelihood of the onset after the age of 75 years (DSM-IV, 1996).

The risk of being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease increases with age (Bee, 1994; Butler et al., 1998; Cavanaugh, 1997). It is estimated that only 1 to 3 percent of persons between the ages of 65 and 75 years exhibit signs of Alzheimer's, but as many as 5 to 8 percent of the people between the ages of 75 and 85 show symptoms of the disease (Bee, 1994). Approximately 15 to 20 percent of the people over the age of 85 exhibit symptoms associated with Alzheimer's disease (Bee, 1994; Butler et al., 1998); thus, further supporting the notion that the likelihood of being diagnosed with Alzheimer's increases as a function of chronological age. Although the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease is relatively low, it is still considered to be one of the most feared chronic diseases of the aged. In addition, the disease has become one of the more prevalent topics addressed by gerontologists, perhaps, because of the increased number of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's and because of the number of uncertainties associated with it. It is my belief that Mary's story could help serve as a basis for gaining a better understanding of the disease process, at least from the perspective of one who has been diagnosed with it.

Alzheimer's disease was first discovered in 1907 by the German neurologist, Alois Alzheimer. Alzheimer first observed particular changes, that occurred in a 51-year-old person. (Butler et. al, 1998; Cavanaugh, 1997; Hamilton, 1994; Holstein, 1997). He noted that the person, a woman, underwent gradual changes in personality, loss of reasoning, had difficulty

maintaining attention, experienced disorientation, language loss, and exhibited changes in intellectual and physical abilities (Hamilton, 1994; Holstein, 1997). Initially, Alzheimer's discovery was considered to be a rare phenomena and was given the label as 'presenile dementia' (Cavanaugh, 1997). However, in the 1970's, the prevalence of Alzheimer's discovery began to be recognized as the same symptomology experienced by people in their later years (Cavanaugh, 1997).

In 1970, Tomlinson, Blessed, and Roth performed a series of brain autopsies on people who were diagnosed with senile dementia. Tomlinson et al. (1970) found a variety of shared characteristics among the people diagnosed with senile dementia. For example, the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease tended to have less viscosity, more plaques, and a greater amount of neurofibrillary change than the brain structures of other older adults. Essentially, Tomlinson et al. (1970) concluded that people with senile dementia have physically different brain structures than those not diagnosed with the disease. This finding was one of the factors that increase researchers' interests in Alzheimer's disease (Hamilton, 1994).

Since the 1970's, many researchers have addressed the need to investigate the etiology and diagnosis of the disease. The authors of the DSM-IV (1994) state that the most common procedure used to diagnosis a person with Alzheimer's disease is through the elimination of all other probable diagnoses. Once all other possibilities have been eliminated, then the person is considered to have 'probable Alzheimer's.' Typically, only a post-mortem brain autopsy can verify the diagnosis (Bee, 1994; Butler et al., 1998). Although Alzheimer's disease is usually associated with senile dementia, is not a necessary condition for having disease, nor is Alzheimer's disease always comorbid with dementia (Butler et. al, 1998). Many have speculated about the rationale for these observations, but to date, the disease process as a whole is still unknown and highly speculative. I believe this further supports the notion for conducting highly individualized and in-depth research.

In the next section I will address the life history methodology as a whole. I believe it is important to understand the origins if the method, so that one can appreciate the outcomes of the findings better. Thus, I will briefly address the origins of this methodology and then draw on the literature associated with implementing this technique.

Life Story Methodology

Life stories are biographical techniques used to “examine how experience is assigned meaning” (Wallace, 1994, p.137). In a sense, life stories are autobiographical accounts about a person that can be obtained through an oral communication or through written accounts, such as diaries (Detzner, 1992; Wallace, 1994). Life stories usually cover a person’s entire life and they help researchers gain a holistic perspective of the person under study (Wallace, 1994).

Much of the published research in the field of gerontology utilizes a case study approach, as a methodological tool when conducting narrative research, as opposed to life stories or life histories. The major difference between using the life stories approach and the case study approach is that case studies tend to focus on present conditions or actions and they tend to rely on long interviews (Detzner, 1992; Wallace, 1994). Also, researchers who utilize the case study approach, tend to focus on a specific topic while interviewing; whereas, those people who use a life story approach, use the person’s entire life history to address specific questions or views that arise when examining the present and future (Wallace, 1994).

The life story approach is useful in obtaining knowledge about Mary’s past to gain a better perspective of how she views herself. The life story approach also is useful in identifying cultural patterns that may have influenced Mary throughout her life and which govern various decisions she has made in life (Atkinson, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Mary’s life story enabled me to discern various systematic levels in her life (Schroots, 1996). For example, I was able to identify people who have influenced her, as well as offer her perceptions of how she has influenced them.

The life history approach can trace its earliest origins to the realm of Freud and Erikson (Atkinson, 1998). Freud uses life history as a basis for applying psychoanalysis; however, he gathered his information from secondary sources (Atkinson, 1998). Erik Erikson used the life history methodology as a form of scientific inquiry to create a new methodology known as psychohistory (Atkinson, 1998, Binion, 1981). Erikson’s theories on human development coupled with his classic study, Young Man Luther and the life story methodology, helped create psychohistory (Albin, 1980). Although some of the theoretic concepts related to psychohistory are not directly tied to the life history approach, there are some very applicable sections within the psychohistory approach. Psychohistorians tend to examine the lives of famous (or infamous) people or people who were participants (willingly or not) in historically noted situations

(deMause, 1982). deMause (1975) sums psychohistory as the process of collecting autobiographies and biographies of ‘extraordinary’ individuals and then using psychoanalysis to gain a better understanding of how the person become labeled ‘extraordinary.’

An often cited example in the psychohistory literature is the Nazi party. To date, many theorists still do not have a solid rationale to describe the radical changes that Nazi party underwent from being a local gang to a violent and relentless collection of people. Psychohistorians have often examined the personality and life experiences of Hitler and extrapolate their findings to the formation of the Nazi party (Binion, 1981; deMause, 1982; Platt, 1980). In addition to examining archival data related to this time period, Erikson (and other psychohistorians) have gathered data from the interviews of former Nazis and concentration camp survivors (deMause, 1982). They have used these accounts to tell each individual’s story and try to answer the larger question of how our society could prevent this travesty from ever occurring again (deMause, 1982). These accounts are but a few in the realm of psychohistory. For additional information and other sources that apply psychohistory to the social sciences, consult Binion’s (1981) *Soundings: Psychohistorical and Psycholiterature*.

Identity and the Aged

Identity was the core concept that I wanted to investigate in my study. Atkinson (1998) noted that life histories are particularly useful for this question, because they are “not the life experience itself but only a representation of it, we might say that telling a life story is a way of organizing experience and fashioning or verifying identity” (pp.11-12). Identity formation of older adults is still a relatively new area of study within the field of gerontology. McAdams (1993) notes the importance of life stories on the process of identity formation for older adults. McAdams (1993) states that as people age, they begin to adopt a historical perspective of their self, and that this historical perspective is usually shared with others in a form of reminiscing. Kroger (1993) on the other hand, sees identity development as a process that is undertaken during adolescence, and is slightly reshaped as he or she interacts with others during his or her life.

Kaufman (1986) sees the process of identity development and the formation of the self as an ongoing process that is rooted in “personal experience, particular structural factors, and a constellation of value orientations” (p. 149). As people age, the meanings that they attribute to their life and others lives change as they engage in new circumstances. In a sense, Kaufman (1986) views the process of identity development as a cumulative process that all people undergo

regardless of chronological age. In fact, Kaufman (1986) states that when older adults refer to their lives in retrospect, they do not “speak of being old as meaning itself; that is, they do not relate aging or chronological age as a category of experience or meaning” (p. 7). Therefore, when older adults speak about themselves, they refer to an identity that is continuous across their lifespan, regardless of age or physical condition (Kauffman, 1986).

In terms of identity formation in the aged, McAdams (1985) views life stories not as a “collection of all events of the individual’s life course, but rather structured self-images” (p. 18). McAdams (1985) sees the process of sharing a life story as equitable to developing an identity. Thus, as people share their life stories, essentially they are recreating their identity, as well as offering an insight to the existing identity that is being recreated (McAdams, 1985). This view is supported by Butler (1963) as well. Butler (1963) states that life reviews are an essential part of older adult’s identity. Butler (1963) claims that life reviews are a “naturally occurring, universal mental process” (p. 66) among all people. Butler (1963) further states that life reviews are a process in which older adults can come to terms with death and reflect back on their lives to resolve any conflicts. Erickson (1980) coined the term “integrity” to address this process of reflecting back on one’s life with a positive outlook.

Most of the research that addresses identity development is controversial and focuses on establishing theoretical frameworks. For example, the works of McAdams (1985) vary greatly from Kaufman (1986). Researchers are constantly debating whether or not identity formation is a stagnant process that ends in adolescence or a continuous process that lasts until death. If the process is stagnant, then it is arguable that the self does not change as over time and remains stable. Others argue that the self does change over time, but at various degrees. The empirical research concerning identity formation and reminiscing is extremely limited. After conducting a thorough literature review, the only empirical studies that I found were conducted by Opie (1992) and Usita, Hyman, and Herman (1998). Both of these studies will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Among the theoretical-oriented articles, I found a common theme, which suggested that more groundwork needs to be done to conceptualize the phenomenon of the developing self (Merriam, 1980). Opie (1992) and Usita et al. (1998) even call for further research utilizing reminiscing as means to narrate the self.

Researching Employing Life Histories in the Study of Alzheimer’s Disease

As stated in the first chapter, the life history approach has not been a popular methodological tool in aging research. Nonetheless, I have located some studies that use this method in aging research, paying particular attention to Alzheimer's disease. In the first study, Opie (1992) investigated New Zealand caregivers' responses about the realities they constructed when caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease. Opie used a life history approach to collect individuals' stories and life experiences and reflect back on the coping techniques they used as caregivers. Through this research, Opie created a caregiver support program that emphasized the concept of sharing and supporting one another. However, critics have proposed that Opie's findings could have been found using alternative sources (Campbell & Binstock, 1996).

Another popular study, using life stories in aging research, is by Sokolovsky (1996). Sokolovsky (1996) collected and analyzed data from a participant that he interviewed on two separate occasions. Sokolovsky illustrated the importance of using grounded theory when using the life history method, by using this scenario of Zina, the participant. Zina migrated to the United States, but she grew up in the Soviet Union. In his study, Sokolovsky focused on identifying the leading factors that attributed to Zina's sense of generosity, now that she was an older adult.

In the first stages of the research, Sokolovsky (1996) clearly states his assumptions he offers a series of propositions to explain Zina's generous behavior. He also offers his own reflections about the interview process and notes possible themes that emerged after the first interview. Then, after the second interview, Sokolovsky revised his original propositions and offered another series of reflections of the interview process. A major critique of Sokolovsky's work, it that he does not offer supporting passages that support his propositions. Rather taking in text conversations from Zina and integrating them into his theories, he simply states his theories. Also, I would question the reliability of the study. Sokolovsky (1996) states that he must make the assumption that Zina is telling him what she believes is true; but, I would validate her story with her family or friends. This study mirrors closely the theoretical stance that I took in my own research. Sokolovsky's study represents one of the few empirical studies that was conducted in regards to identity formation in later adulthood.

The next major outlet for finding literature on Alzheimer's disease, comes from the popular press. The last few years have produced wonderful accounts about caregivers and people diagnosed with the disease learn to cope with the disease process. Davis (1989) wrote a book

about the experiences that he and his wife shared together, once she was diagnosed with probable Alzheimer's disease. Davis' book, entitled *My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease*, is a narrative account about his marriage with his wife and the hardships they faced together as she progressed with the disease. Davis and his wife draw on their spirituality and faith to help cope with the disease and throughout the book, Davis offers an intense introspection of himself as he changes. Although this book would be considered 'pop literature' as opposed to a scholarly study, the insights and in-depth descriptions that the book contain make it a valuable reference.

Another popular book by Henderson and Andrews (1998), *Partial View: An Alzheimer's Journal*, centers around a person diagnosed with disease. In this book, Cary Henderson, a professor at James Madison University, writes about his experiences as a person diagnosed with probable Alzheimer's disease. This book presents a candid view from the perspective of the person suffering from the disease. Once Henderson discovered his diagnosis, he began recording his thoughts on tape and started a daily journal of his experiences. As time passed, his records showed how he was slowly losing his own identity, but Henderson confided in his journal of knowing of his memory loss and the manner in which he coped the disease. Henderson and Andrews book lends real value to this study, because the attitudes expressed by Henderson were not present with my participant. Henderson's narrative account helps justify the position that not all people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease have the same, or in this case, similar experiences.

Dynamical Identity Model

The Dynamical Identity is a comprehensive effort to integrate various developmental theories in order to explain human development and the on-set of Alzheimer's disease. This model incorporates Erikson's theory of identity development and the theoretical constructs associated with symbolic interactionism, and the basic model functioning of the ecological theory. The ecological theory was proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) as a series of nested systems outside the individual that affect behavior and described these interactions between people and their environment. These systems interact with one another to create a holistic view that represents the individual. Bronfenbrenner created five of these systems. They are:

Microsystem: This consists of the immediate settings that interact with the person. Examples include: family, friends, church, peers, and health care providers.

Mesosystem: Is the boundary that links the various microsystems with one another, as

well as the exosystem. Examples include: peers may share the same church environment or extended family may interact with immediate family on given occasions.

Exosystem: A series of systems that the individual does not necessarily participate in, but may influence the microsystems. Examples include: mass media, friends of the family, extended family, neighbors.

Macrosystem: Consists of the larger cultural context in which all of the other systems reside. This system provides value and meaning to the other systems and affected how the other systems interact with the individual. Examples include: culture and ideologies.

Chronosystem: This system is the larger sociohistorical context in which the individual lives as well as transition occurring within the lifecourse.

The dynamical identity model mirrors Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, except for the core and the chronosystem (see Figure 1). The core is the central part of the theory that focuses on the individual. The core is the essence of the organism, which consists of the subsystems located only within the individual. In this scenario, the core is the key to establishing, maintaining, and refining the concept of identity. The core constantly changes as it interacts with the other systems. A weak core may lead to difficulty when coping with change (or unexpected responses from people), but a strong core system may be more resilient to change and create less stress on the system as a whole. For example, people with a weak core may become stressed when they interact with other people and are told that they are 'arrogant and selfish', when they think of themselves as kind and caring. A person with a strong core on the other hand, may be more resilient and think to him/herself "this is one opinion of one person...I know I am kind and caring" or "maybe I really am selfish and arrogant...I should change my ways and become kind and caring."

Essentially, the concept of the core is based from my interactions with people in general. These observations are from my antidotal experiences while working with individuals diagnosed with probable Alzheimer's disease. I believe that people who have a strong core, have a strong knowledge base of how they see themselves. These people are not threatened when others challenge that knowledge base, because they are secure. Having worked in adult day services for three years, I have had the opportunity to expand my insights on people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Although my experiences are somewhat limited and antidotal, I believe that they still lend credence to my model. I believe this core is essential for maintaining one's identity structure and it is a key component for people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. My

hypothesis states that people with Alzheimer's disease slowly lose their sense of identity. I believe that if a person maintains a strong core, that this could help delay the onset of the identity loss. Having positive interactions with the other systems and having a phenomenological understanding of the self, may help increase the integrity of the core.

The other four systems listed in Bronfenbrenner's are the same for my model, except that they interact with this core to help establish and maintain the sense of self. Also, these other four layers can strengthen or weaken the core depending on the interactions and trajectory of the entire system. The chronosystem, is the other systems level I would modify in Bronfenbrenner's model when applying my model to people with Alzheimer's disease. In the Dynamical Identity Model, I break the chronosystem down into two components: time and vortex.

Time in this model, is simply a progression of chronological time: $t + n$, where n is a positive number. The vortex, on the other hand can be seen in Figure 3. Essentially as time progresses and the person enters into the realm of Alzheimer's disease, a vortex forms around the entire system. The funnel shape vortex pulls on the system and causes several outcomes. First, the vortex of Alzheimer's disease will pull and stretch these systems until the systems are no longer linear and they no longer nested in one another. Also, at some point, the vortex will cause the systems to collapse upon themselves, resulting in identity loss, or loss of self. Finally, at the tip of the vortex, is death. Death is not necessarily caused by Alzheimer's disease, rather caused because of the disease process.

This vortex and strength of the vortex varies from one person to another. In a sense, people can be diagnosed with the symptoms, yet take several years to reach the collapsing point, whereas others may reach the collapsing point in a matter of months. Also, the strength of each system can help delay the onset of the collapsing point. Having a strong core can enable the person to delay reaching the collapsing point. It is possible to strengthen the systems at any point in people's lives, though once a person enters into the vortex, strengthening the systems become more difficult.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is a wonderful example of integrating systems theory into human development. However, the model is not without its limitations. First, the ecological theory concentrates on system interfaces, but ignores the developmental pathway of the organism as a whole. To compensate for this limitation, I draw from the dynamic systems theory perspective. Thelen and Smith (1994) view developmental progression in quantifiable terms.

The most common aspect to look at developmental out come is with the equation:

$$q = f(N)$$

Where q is the “vector representing the lumping together of the known and relevant subcomponents of the system” (Thelen & Smith, p. 61) and N is a “nonlinear function of the vector of the states...” (Thelen & Smith, p. 61). Essentially, this equation shows that systems travel on a progressive pathway (the path denoted as q) that are determined by non-linear parameters (these parameters being the function denoted N). Therefore, it is best to think of Figure 1, the Identity Model, being set in motion along some trajectory that is determined by extraneous parameters.

In Figure 2, I depict the Identity Model (as seen in Figure 1), as it progresses throughout life possible outcomes are faced and paths are chosen. At each point, the Model has a one or more possible paths to choose from. Schroots (1995a, 1995b, 1996) coined these transitions as “branching points.” Schroots (1996) states that branching points are “defines as those changes in life of the individual which direct the life path distinctly, and which are separated in time from each other by one or more affective, important, critical events, experiences or happenings” (p. 120). The life course can be seen as traveling in a ‘state space’ or a plane of existence which defines possible conditions of behaviors of the system, as well as a range that constrains degrees of freedom (Thelen and Smith, 1994). In other words, as systems develop they are more apt to continue in that form of development, because as a person develops, his or her ability to radically alter development is reduced (Thelen & Smith). For example, once a life path is chosen (i.e. getting married), other possible life paths will be eliminated or pruned (i.e. being active in the dating scene).

Therefore, by incorporating the Identity model as an active agent along a trajectory or possible developmental outcomes, it becomes a Dynamical Identity Model. The goal of this model is to use Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory as a basis for exploring identity development, but also look at the ecological model across the lifespan. Again, in Figure 2, I show possible outcomes that the Identity Model could have taken, but I depict a path that led to the vortex depicted in Figure 3. Essentially, I created Figure 2 to illustrate that it is possible for people ‘predestined’ for certain outcomes in life, not to experience those outcomes, given the right conditions and circumstances throughout life.

Summary

The literature presented above does not comprise an exhaustive review of all existing literature related to Alzheimer's disease and the life history approach. Rather, it serves to offer a better understanding of the diverse literature that exists on this topic, as well as the need for further research that examines Alzheimer's disease using qualitative methodology. The Dynamical Identity Model is a first step to expand Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to incorporate basic concepts from the dynamic systems theory perspective. It is my hope that this approach will help explain the onset of Alzheimer's disease and clarify some of the inconsistencies that people have as they progress with the disease.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter begins with a background description of Mary. This brief background will help illustrate why I decided to invite Mary to participate in my study and the basic assumptions that I had about her. Following this, I then describe the exact methodological approach I used.

Mary

I chose to tell the story of a participant who was enrolled in the Virginia Tech Adult Day Services. Due to issues of confidentiality, I shall refer to her simply as Mary. Mary, an 80 year-old woman, was diagnosed with dementia and probable Alzheimer's disease in 1994. As mentioned earlier, there is no method for determining a person who has Alzheimer's disease; thus, Mary is suspected of having the disease, but this has not been conclusively determined. In addition to dementia, Mary has been diagnosed with lymphocytic Leukemia; but, to date, this condition has been classified as stable. Also, Mary has osteoarthritis, a common condition for older adults, and she is believed to have mild depression, as a result of the possible diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

Mary lives with her husband, who is considered her primary caregiver, and she has an adult daughter and son. Her daughter lives in close proximity and is often involved with caregiving duties. Although Mary's husband and children are capable of providing continuous caring for her, they enrolled her in the adult day services in order to provide a respite for the family. Mary attends adult day services approximately two days a week. As noted in her application to the center, one of the reasons why Mary started attending Adult Day Services is due to the diagnoses of probable Alzheimer's disease. Although her prognosis is questionable, she is considered to be in the early stages of the disease process, and shows some signs of short-term memory loss. To date, Mary has not shown any signs of confusion or long-term memory loss, and neither she nor her family has reported any other health problems

Mary enrolled in the Virginia Tech Adult Day Services in May of 1997 and she is a regular attendant of the day services program. Since 1997, Mary has actively participated in most, if not all, of the programs and activities during the days in which she was present. To date, Mary has been noted as having an outgoing personality by the adult day services staff.

Listening to and Creating the Story

This study utilized the qualitative method of the life history to examine the phenomena of interest. After searching through various qualitative methodologies, I felt that the life history

approach would offer the best analytic and interpretative aspects in regard to Mary's story. The life history approach allows researchers to listen to people tell stories about their lives and gain a richer understanding of human behavior (Atkinson, 1998). Life histories are defined by Atkinson (1998) as:

The story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants other to know of it, usually as a result of guided interview by another (p. 8)

My goal as the researcher in this study, was to collect and interpret Mary's life story. In order to utilize the life history approach, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with Mary. These interviews were conducted at Virginia Tech Adult Day Services during the times that Mary attended the program. Specifically, I conducted the interviews in the 'Intergenerational' room located just outside of Virginia Tech Adult Day Services. In this setting, I placed two living room chairs across from one another, so we could maintain eye contact.

I divided the process of collecting Mary's life story into a series of in-depth interviews of about two hours apiece. Due to my concerns about Mary's health, I did not want to extend the interviews past that time; so, I was very careful to monitor the time that we spent together and I was careful to notice any signs of fatigue.

I interviewed Mary on five different occasions. Originally, I planned to collect about 15 hours of interview time, but I found that we reached data saturation fairly quickly, after about ten hours of interview time. Data saturation is "the point of data collection where the information you get becomes redundant" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 68). Nonetheless, each interview consisted of questions generated from Appendix A. The last interview session was used as a means to validate and expand themes that were identified in the previous interviews. I will discuss the manner in which these themes were identified later in this chapter.

I used a tape recorder as my primary source of data gathering during each interview, accompanied with rough field notes. At the conclusion of each interview, I wrote a brief synopsis, addressing possible themes that emerged, questions to address in later interviews, and possible applications of the information to my Dynamical Identity Model. In addition to the synopsis, I transcribed the tapes and reviewed my notes in preparation for the next interview.

For each interview set, I reviewed the transcripts at least three times. The first time that I read the transcripts, I checked for word accuracy and typographical errors. Then, I reread the

transcripts looking for the emergence of general themes and/or any statements that could be clarified in subsequent interviews. Finally, at the conclusion of the interview process, I read the transcripts once more to gain a holistic view of Mary's life and the interview process as a whole.

Reviewing the transcriptions immediately after each interview was helpful for several reasons. First, this process helped me organize my data and helped guide me during the next interview sessions. Also, the transcription process helped me discover developing themes, and it gave me the opportunity to further explore various aspects in Mary's life, before ending our interview sessions. Before the conclusion of our interview sessions, I presented Mary a copy of the transcripts to review at her leisure. Not knowing whether or not she would read the transcripts, I offered to read them to her. Each time she politely declined, and she took the transcripts home with her. My intentions were to allow Mary the opportunity to append them, by adding greater detail or strike out any statements that she deemed inappropriate. I wanted Mary to revisit and reconstruct her story with my interpretations, but she said they were fine.

Another important issue to discuss with Mary and her family is the ownership of her story. As of yet, I have not had the opportunity to do so. Although Mary and her family have signed consent forms, I would not want to violate their privacy in any way. My intention is to safeguard Mary's identity to the best of my capability, but I want to share Mary's story to all those who will listen. Therefore, when I present Mary and her family a final copy of all of the information, I will address this concern. I will not attempt to publish or divulge any information, unless both Mary and her caregiver offer me explicit permission. I will tell them of my intentions to publish and share Mary's life, and will express to the family the need of sharing such an important story.

Interpreting the Story

On the third reading of the transcripts, I implemented an open-coding system. The open-coding system is defined as a process of naming and categorizing a particular phenomena by looking closely at the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I started this process by deconstructing and labeling the data on a line-by-line basis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As I read this data, I formed specific categories for each area addressed in the data. For example, I created a coding category that encompassed five major themes in Mary's life: her relationship with her father, her relationship with her husband, her relationship with her children, her work ethic, and her life philosophy. I will address each of these themes in greater detail in Chapter 5. After creating

these categories, I started to look for specific parts in her life story that would fit in each of these categories. In a sense, I developed properties for each of the categories based on segments from her life story (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

After I developed the categories, I continued to examine the data and I found specific scenarios in her life story that related to these categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). These scenarios were marked on the transcripts as relating to a specific category and I used these scenarios as probes when exploring the same category in the next interview. (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). For example, in this case, I wanted Mary to explain more about her life philosophy. In order to help guide her, I framed the response as follows:

Sean: Okay, I noticed that earlier that you talked about how people should strive to really make a difference and be happy with themselves and really strive to make a difference in their lives that they can look back later in their life and be happy that they done something...

Mary: Yeah, my daddy had a big, influence. He said that you're going to be working with all types of people and of course you won't know the whole history, but sometimes they like to get everything out, so you know everything they know. And whatever you hear from them, you do not repeat to other customers, because if that does happen and that customer knows that other customer told you, they might say what do you mean by talking about me. Everybody is different, that's what he told me. Be very careful what you talk about, even if you re very angry about something that happened to somebody else. Don't take it out on the customers, because the customers are your business. So, I was happy that he said to me, because you find out when working, that is true, because you were pleasant all of the time and had good conversation...

In addition to offering guides to address specific areas, I reworded many of the interview questions to test for validity. For example, I would ask "...today when you think about your life, what might be your biggest worry that you have?" Then, sometime in a later interview, I would ask "...are you at peace with yourself?" This allowed me to compare and contrast her responses and it allowed Mary the opportunity to expand her thoughts.

I wrote a series of synopses, which I used to construct theoretical memos. These theoretical memos stated my decisions for creating specific categories and specific themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In addition, I used these memos as a means to formulate various hypotheses about the categories and about the relationships they have with one another.

At the conclusion of my data gathering, I tested my hypotheses one last time. As Corbin

and Strauss (1990) state, “a key feature of grounded theory is not that hypotheses remained unverified, but that hypotheses are constantly revised during the research until they hold true for all of the evidence concerning the phenomena under study” (p. 11). At the conclusion of my fourth interview, I tested my theoretical constructs with my advisor, Andy Stremmel. Dr. Stremmel and I agreed on all five themes, but our opinions varied in the conceptual labeling. We also discussed the relationship that each theme had with one another and our opinions were in agreement. In my last interview, I stated each of the five themes that I noted in Mary’s life, and asked her if I was correct in my assumptions or if she disagreed with my assumptions. Mary agreed that these five areas were in fact very important to her and she agreed that all five of these themes had a significant impact on the person that she is today.

Chapter 4: Telling the Story

Introduction

This chapter presents a chronological account of Mary's life based on the interviews. Each account reflects a story within the larger story of Mary's life. These stories offer candid insights about Mary's past help illustrate her life by providing vivid recollections. The sole purpose of this chapter is to share these stories as they were told. The next chapter addresses the predominate themes throughout her life and makes an attempt to integrate the Dynamical Identity Model with Mary's identity formation. While reading these stories, I urge you to picture the scenarios and imagine yourself as Mary.

Mary's Life

Mary's parents were natives of Czechoslovakia who immigrated to the United States in the turn of the century. In Czechoslovakia, her parents' parents knew one another, although her parents were not introduced to one another until they reached the United States. In Czechoslovakia her father's and mother's families grew up in the same small town. However, Mary's mother's family decided to immigrate to the United States in the hopes of finding better employment opportunities.

Usually the people in a very little town in Czechoslovakia [would try] to keep in touch with when they go to America and those people tr[ie]d] to keep in touch with others in America. My dad knew my mother's parents in Czechoslovakia so when he came to America he...decided to get married and tried to find out where they were since he knew her parents.

As luck would have it, Mary's father was able to keep in contact with Anne's parents (Mary's mother's family), and they eventually were married around 1900. Mary was born on September 20, 1918 and was the first of four children. Her brothers and sister are: Victor, Andrew, and Terry. Life in the Pavlik house was tough at times, but it was always filled with love. Mary describes her parents as being strict, but fair. When it came to discipline, Mary said that:

If you got too rowdy you got spanked. And they had a stick that long [approximately one and half feet] and belt that was sliced up into four pieces and about that long [same as the stick] and if you got one, you had three or four pieces of mark on your butt. We learned to pay attention.

Mary said that she was a fast learner when it came to listening to her parents, but her older brother was a bit slower...

He was always into mischief. I always used to tell him, you're going to have to settle down or this is going to continue. I said, 'I learned my lesson...no, no, no I know there's a stick what comes when you're not paying attention.' (laughter)

Although they were strict, Mary sees her parents as being very loving and helpful. Whenever Mary confronted a situation or had a problem, she always sought her parents' advice. Here, in Mary's words, she describes how she viewed her parents as mentors:

When I was home before I got married, any time that I had something bother me I just ask my daddy 'What do you do in case of this?' And he would tell me, well you could do either this or this and he would always give me an answer. I still feel proud of him doing that, because if I couldn't get it from him, where could I go to? My mom helped me that way too. If you can cope some of the things that some of those people have to put up with or have to think about how bad it is for somebody to put with pregnancies and all kinds of problems in their families and look at yourself and still try to be pleasant, well that's hard to do. You have to learn how to be a good listener, a good person to hope to help somebody else if they have any problems and they come to you to put all their problems on your should. 'What would you do in this case or what would you do in that case?' and be able to give them a descent idea. You can't give up, that's the wrong thing to do. If you can't find something to help yourself with, then you're in big trouble. I said I'm happy with my family and my folks were always good listeners. If I wanted to sit and talk to them about some sort of thing, I could do it and I would get some answers. So I was happy with my family. My momma helped out with things that turned out at times and it was always something to brighten my future or always know that worse things than those things that happened to you or anybody else, but they had to overcome the future in order to get on with their life or they would be in big trouble. Other than that, I liked fun, I liked to learn new things all the time and always tried to remember to try and keep pleasant with every person that you meet and I meet an awful lot of people when I worked in my daddy's store and I had to work with a lot when I was a beautician...When my daddy thought I would make of the stuff up, I remember to this day that it was to my, for my that I had something to look forward to, that mom and dad would help me out with a problem or that I could ask them what should I do about this or I was just happy that I was always around somebody who I could, if I had some type of a problem that I could go back 'What should I do? I don't know, I should just give up, but you're not supposed to give up. They would tell you that you're not supposed to give up, you're supposed to try to figure out what went wrong or what is the wonderful thing about it and try to remember it before all kinds of things happen in this world and you aren't the, you're not the only person to learn how to cope with this... I could be helpful and I was happy that my kids would come to me and ask 'What am I doing here with this problem?' And I would tell them the good things and the bad things and that I could help them. So feel good about myself that I did that, and think my daddy was the same type of person. If you can help someone with their problem, then help them. If you can't say 'I'm sorry that I can't help, but I

understand that you are going through an awful stage of life.’ Anyway, I think my parents were very pleasant at times, mean at times, but that was the reason why I went to them with my problems. I didn’t want to learn the hard way and whenever I had my children, I would say you do it this way or else. When I was there age they used to always tell me ‘you listen to what I have to say or else.’ Okay mom, I don’t want to be in trouble. And I would do it that way. Then, somebody would say, who told you do it that way and I would say parents are good listeners and they learned it from way back.

Another important factor in the Pavlik house was religion.

When we were growing up, my mother was trying to explain to us that there is confession and communion in the Catholic church and when you do something that is not right, you have to confess that sin to get uh...what’s the word...forgiveness from the Lord. I always remembered my mom telling us that and she tried to, that’s what I have been told...

Mary’s devotion to the Catholic Church has been a primary aspect throughout her life. To this day, she attends “church every Sunday and pray[s] every day.” In one setting, I asked Mary about God and her thoughts about God, and this is what she has to say:

I picture God as a parent. He seems like He tries to tell you one way or another when things go wrong, I figured if the good Lord didn’t want me to do that and if I do something that is nice, and the good Lord is helping me, then I should be proud of something that I have done. Other than that, I feel that if you don’t care that the good Lord is not there, you’re wrong, because He has helped me millions and millions of times. I always turn to Him to keep me going and always given the right answer...

The Slavic Culture was important in Mary’s childhood as well. Her family spoke their native language in the home and she often played with other children from Slavic countries. Also, being first-generation American, Mary was often reminded by her parents about the hardships that they faced when they lived in Czechoslovakia. This unique insight helped Mary remain appreciative of aspects of the American culture. For example, Mary states that people in the United States have the right to choose their occupation and future careers, because they have more opportunities than most people in Czechoslovakia. Mary says that if her parents would have stayed in Czechoslovakia, they probably would have been farmers, instead a barber.

Daddy’s Barbershop and Confectionery Store

Mary’s father, Stephan, started as a coal miner, but after a brief period of time working in the mines, he decided to pursue another occupation. Her father learned how to be a barber by

becoming an apprentice. Although he never had any formal education, he earned his barber's license. He and wife settled in a small town in Pennsylvania.

He didn't go to school, he just watched another barber. He would just go in there and just watch how he would clip hair and how he would hold the comb to it the right way. So, he finally he got his license and everything and he was just tickled pink as he could be.

After getting his license, Stephan purchased a two-room building and started his own business.

You see, my daddy was a barber and he had a little confectionery store in the next room...We had bread and ice cream and all that kind of stuff. Candy, tobacco, a few cans of vegetables, stuff like that on the shelves...We had to learn how to put ice cream in a cone and not crack the cone. I had to learn how to open up a bottle with a little gadget underneath of the corner there for a bottle for anybody who wanted a bottle of pop, then I had to learn that you can have different types of tobacco for pipes and how much it costs and how much the candy costs and if got two or three or just on e for a penny. Cookies we didn't have very often. So, that is what we were taught and if I had trouble, I would just call my daddy from the barber shop and he would take that light brush and shake some of the hair off of himself before he came into the store. He would then ask us what we needed to know it worked out fine.

Originally, the building was across the street from Mary's house, but after some time, the landowner wanted to build a gas station on his property, so Mary's father had to move his building.

He had to move it across the street and turn it around, so it faced the street again. Of course we had to move the house back. So it was a lot of trouble to do all of that, but we managed to get through...Once he had the business in his own yard, which made it easier to take care of. If he needed us come work in the store and he had a few customers in the barbershop, he didn't want to leave them in the chair to take care of the people in the store. He had a bell and while we were home form school, he would ring that bell for us to come and take of the customers while he worked. He didn't want to leave the customers too many times while they were in the chair, because he didn't want them to complain.

Mary's father often relied on his children to tend to the store, while he cut hair. Mary says that there were times when she resented working in the store and being forced to leave her studies or friends, but working in the store taught her many valuable lessons. She excelled in arithmetic in school, because she learned how to count out money at a young age. Besides from the basic academics, Mary learned far more important lessons. Watching her father engage customers while cutting their hair gave Mary the practical knowledge about how to deal with

people. Over and over again, her father would tell her to be pleasant to people and always treat others nicely. Her father also taught her how to be patient with people and instilled into her the value of education (both formal and informal). In fact, Mary recalls:

But it was an education and he always told me ‘Always be polite no matter how mad you get about something. Always be polite. I don’t want to hear anything, because I’m in the next room.’ And if I said ‘What do you want?’ You are going to hear about it. It’s ‘May I help you please? Is there something that I can help you with?’ Very pleasantly. ‘What do want?’ would show that you were mad and he would tell about it...he (Stephan) would say be sure to talk pleasantly no matter how mad you are, because I don’t want anybody to come back when you’re not here and tell me ‘I don’t know what you did to your daughter, but she sure is a dog-gone rotten...businessperson.’

Mary’s attitudes were shaped by her father’s insistence of treating customers well. Mary was reminded from time to time, that if she treated the customers badly, then they would not return. Her father was especially concerned about repeat business, because his customers were the means for his livelihood, so that is why instilled this value into Mary and her siblings.

Lessons Learned from Mom

Mary’s mother, Anne, was instrumental for teaching Mary about religion and the Catholic church. Her mother was patient with her and taught her a valuable lesson: choose a path in life that will bring you the most happiness and don’t choose something that may bore you. Her mother also taught her the basics in life: how to cook, wash clothes, wash dishes, and perform regular household chores. Although her mother was the disciplinarian in the family, Mary respected her greatly for instilling good values in her and for teaching her the essentials in life. “I was proud of her to reprimand us, because I think we turned out to be pretty good kids.”

The Great Depression

When Mary was about 12 years old, the Great Depression took hold in the United States. Many people have expressed their own struggles during that period of time (Turkel, 1886). Turkel collected an oral history of the Great Depression about how various people viewed their lives during that time period. Turkel’s findings ranged from person, to person, yet there was always one underlining theme, ‘times were tough.’ Mary has her own view of that time.

When the Depression came, then things started falling apart, because people started getting their hair cut every third month instead of every month...they would get

their hair cut when it was longer...and people would shave themselves, instead of getting one. They were tough times, but we also had ice cream, we had tobacco, we

had cookies, we had some vegetables in cans, and other stuff. We got a few extra dollars from the store also and that helped out. He was the type of person who learned how to save and make due in tough times. So it got tough in the Depression being a barber, but he managed

Mary recalls that times were tough, but her father still insisted that she and her siblings take good care themselves and wear clean clothes.

He managed to keep us dressed and told us to ‘Always keep clean, have clean clothes on, mom can wash them, you can iron them when you get older. You can dirty when playing, but you have to be clean when working in the store. When handling candy and ice cream, if you’re not clean, then the people won’t come back.

Growing up in consumer environment, helped Mary gain a better perspective on customer appeal, as well as managing a business. As we will see later, this type of informal education helped guide Mary in her later life, when she became a beautician.

Summer Vacation at Grandma’s

Mary’s childhood was not always filled with work and difficult times. One of Mary’s favorite activity to do as a child, was visit her grandparent’s farm.

They lived...on a farm. They lived on 208 acres of farm and my grandmother had 14 children and that’s when in the summer times I went to visit them my grandparents, a lot of had died for whatever and often wondered why they would pick a 208 acre farm. Of course they had a lot of children and so they got everybody to do a job to do on the farm especially in the summer time when it time to feed off the farm and get all the stuff in and cut the stuff down and gather it up and when it came hay time my mother and my brother and I would go on vacation at that time and they would do this to so they could help in some way and my mother wanted to do what she had to show us so we could have an idea of what it is to be a farmer and at that time I just thought that it was an amazing thing to do and go to.

Mary, her mother, and siblings would travel every summer to help out with the farm. Mary’s mother would take them out to the farm for a few days during the hay season, so they could help their uncles and aunts with the farming chores. Mary would help cut the hay, string it out at night into piles, and then spread it out again in the mornings to dry. Then, Mary would help trample the hay down, while becoming caked in dirt. Mary never saw any of this as work, because she had fun learning about farming and managing farms. Knocking down the hay and stacking it again was a privilege for her, because “it was something to learn, because we didn’t do that in the city.” Also, Mary had an uncle her age, who she loved to talk to. Her Uncle

Johnny and she would talk all day about anything and everything. So, when her friends would ask her about working on the farm during the summer, she would promptly correct them, and tell them it was not work, but a vacation.

School Days

I loved school. I just couldn't wait until the next day. I don't know, I was always interested in learning something different every day and that's what I got out of it. I really enjoyed it, every day of it. I never said 'Gee, I'm going to pretend I'm sick today, because I don't want to go.' I never had that thought. I could wait until I could go back to school...The only things I didn't like about childhood was dealing with Scarlet fever, chicken pocks, and the mumps and all that junk that we had to go through. I didn't catch everything, but I had my share of them. I think it's awful you get to miss school and I loved school and I enjoyed every minute of my schooling. I used to feel awful staying home, like I was cheating and not getting my education, when I has those things on my face or lumps in my throat.

Mary valued school greatly during her childhood. Many times she would stay up late studying her lessons. Although she did not consider herself to be an 'A' student, Mary says that she tried her best to get the most out of school.

I would consider myself a 'B' student. Sometimes we think we know things that we have read and take a test and we get the test back, we find out that our answers are not the answers and we were missing out and you better this stuff again before we take another final test on it.

Nonetheless, schooling was fun and it always contained something new that would intrigue Mary. Her father ingrained into her a sense of respect for public education, because he believed that any form of education, albeit formal or informal, could help a person could become anything that he or she desired.

Mary attended primary school, a couple of blocks away from her house. The school was difficult to walk to, because the city had not paved sidewalks for her to walk on. Then, for elementary school, Mary went to Catholic school, between 4th and 7th grade. Mary wanted to attend Catholic school for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, she wanted Communion and she wanted to learn more about Catholicism. Also, Mary enjoyed the structure and dedication to teaching and learning that the nuns had. Going to Catholic school was quite an adventure for Mary, because "to go to Catholic school, I had to ride the street cars, so I had to take 2 street cars in order to get to Catholic school near the church."

Then, in eighth grade, Mary decided to return to public school and attend the junior high

school down the street from her house. She believed that a year in the public junior high school would her transition to the public high school. However, before she made this transition, her father met with the junior high school principal and inquired about the suitability of the school for meeting Mary's needs.

He looked in to it and find out what it was all about and so I went to the other school talked to the principal and asked all of questions. And he said well, since you did okay at the other school, I'm sure she'll do okay here.

Mary attended her last few years of high school downtown again. She graduated with a specialization in business, figuring that this background would best suit her needs. Mary believed that one day she might own a beauty shop or she might help her father manage his shop.

Skunks Galore

One of Mary's favorite extracurricular activities was collecting skunks. In fact, her reputation for collecting skunks became so pronounced in high school, that her friends nicknamed her 'Stinky.' Mary did not quite adhere to her nickname, but she still enjoyed collecting and displaying her skunk collection.

I just thought I would have a collection of skunks. Of all the animals, I had to collect them. I had quite a mess of them and I always had them displayed on the table and oh all the animals...why skunks and I said 'cause nobody likes them and I think they are clever.'...I have an awful big collection of these things... different shapes, different colors, and I don't even know where I put them.

On Becoming a Beautician

When Mary was in Catholic school, she was "sure that [she] wanted to be a nun." Mary said, "I just thought that their outfits were just out of this world and the discipline that they gave the kids was my ideal." However, like most childhood dreams, this idea changed when left Catholic school and attended public school. Then, for a brief period of time, Mary thought about becoming a teacher. However, Mary knew that her father could not afford to send her to college, so she thought about doing secretarial work. To help her prepare for this career, Mary took shorthand in high school, but she did not do as well as she would have liked.

Throughout high school, Mary set hair for many of her friends. Sometimes they would pay her 50 cents or a dollar, but usually she would get a quarter and would just be grateful for receiving any money. Mary recalls her earliest experiences with setting hair:

They would wash them and I would set them and I didn't have to comb it out and they gave me what they wanted, which wasn't very much, anyhow I though if I had

customers that are satisfied, with that education, I don't know...I could do better when I go to school to get some more ideas...

When Mary told her father that she wanted to go to beauty school, she was rather surprised by his response. At first, her father was against her becoming a beautician. He worried about "applying electric to the hair" and was concerned that Mary could potentially damage a person's hair. He tried to discourage her by saying 'you can go to jail for messing up their hair' or 'you might have to pay a fine if it gets messed up.' Mary recounts the first time that she told her father of future plans:

Later on I told him I want to go back to school and he said 'What do you want to do?' and I said 'I'm going to be a beautician.' 'Oh yeah, you have all the brains for all that stuff?' 'Yeah' 'Well you know what happens if lot of beauticians aren't very careful, they burn some hair and it will cost the family a lot of money to that head back in shape.' Well, he went to three or four beauticians and talked to them and they said 'If she pays attention in class, she'll do fine.' Then daddy said 'Ok, but if you get low grades, that's it.' I said, 'Okay, I'll promise I'll make good grades, because that's what I really want to do.'

So, after talking to some of the beauticians in the town, her father realized that Mary's career choice was quite similar to his. After doing some investigative work, her father gave her permission to attend beauty school, so long as she paid attention to her teachers (which was never a problem for Mary).

The whole concept of applying chemicals to people's heads and placing electricity on the hair fascinated Mary. She loved learning about new styles and she enjoyed working on her friends' hair. Most importantly though, Mary loved talking to people and engaging people in stimulating conversations.

Working in the Beauty Shop

After completing beauty school and earning her license, Mary went to work at a local beauty shop.

When I started off at a place that was a little too sophisticated, too fussy I thought I would just find a place where people were happy the way I did their hair. They can explain to me what they want and I will decide on how to set it, so it will turn out that way. Other than that, I had a lot of clientele. The first 6 months, I was getting a new customer every other week. When they came or when they called for appointments, those ones would ask for me to do it. There was other people who could, I think there were 5 girls working there, so everybody had their own clientele who would follow them and it worked out just fine.

Mary enjoyed the working in the second shop, because she was able to have more clients. At the highlight of career, Mary had “about 50 girls that came to [her].” She greatly enjoyed her work and she often listened to her clients’ stories. She used those valuable lesson taught by her father and put them to practice.

Being a beautician you have to make conversation, even if you don’t like them at all, but you don’t show it. Make conversation and make them feel as though everything is fine, even if you have a lot of trouble. Don’t tell anybody your problems, because they have enough of their own. So, as I have gone through that school and got a job. At first I was a little nervous, because was I doing the right thing and talking about the right things? Once in a while, I would leave it up to the customer to try and make conversation and then they would talk about a subject and I would add to it or ask them ‘Well, when did you this?’ It was interesting at times and it turned out great that way, because I would find something that they would like to talk about and always made my self seem interested in what they would talk about in their conversation. As you may find out that word passes on, that person might tell that other person and they fond out that you’re that type of person who doesn’t look after whatever you say or whatever do and not do a good job... If they found out that you told people, they would get mad. My daddy would tell me just remember one thing, ‘when you’re working, especially with new customers, they like talking a lot, first talk about the weather or something that had gotten to see or a movie or pick out a topic of conversation that both of you can talk about and not get into trouble.’ I was very careful about the things I talked about with the customers. If they would start to talk about a person or ask questions, I would very quickly give an answer, and if they wanted a little more, or I would even say I prefer not to talk about them or answer that question. I didn’t want to say anything that would cause trouble. But my daddy warned to be careful what you talk about, he said avoid topics that would make them think that you were a person who would get ideas about what people did and why they did them and then they would think that you were a tattle-tale and don’t be a tattle-tale.

Though, there were times when a customer would upset Mary, but would never let it show. She said that when she felt upset or mad at a person, she would place them under the drier and then take a quick break in the supply room, out of sight, to calm herself down and relax before returning to her customer. This was another lesson she learned from her father ‘you be pleasant no matter how bad you feel, but be pleasant’ and ‘always be polite no matter how mad you get about something.’ Mary continued as a beautician, until the early 1940s. Her career as a beautician was interrupted when World War II began and the United States joined the war.

The Wedding

Some point after Mary graduated from beauty school, she was asked to be a bride's maid in her cousin's wedding. This wedding just happened to be in Frank's hometown and he was one of the neighbors of the bride. He started asking people about Mary, the minute he took notice of her. "He asked my friends 'Who is she? Where is she from?'...he wanted to see who [I] was, so I stuck around to see who he was." Frank wanted to know all about Mary, and he certainly caught her attention with this pick-up line "Well, he told that guy that I came with 'She may be your partner going to church and coming back, but after that she's mine.' I thought 'Who...do you think you are?'" Mary remembers the wedding vividly:

He danced with a girl that I knew and he waited until the music stopped and came up to me and said 'May I dance with, this next dance?' [I said] 'Well it all depends on what they are going to play', trying to be hard to get...

After the wedding, Frank showed up at Mary's door quite unexpectedly. Mary thought that the line he used at the wedding was just a rouse, and she was slightly distraught when she walked out and saw him outside her door. She decided to take a chance, especially since he had another couple with him at the time, and go out on a date. Since he did not own a car, he always had to convince a friend to lend him a car or convince a friend to go on a double date. To say the least, dating was a difficult prospect for Frank, but he always managed to get a hold of a car. After dating for some time, Mary remembers:

He always kind of hinted, would you like to do this in the future, where would you like to live in the future...always the future. And I thought I know what he's climbing up to, he is going to ask me to get married one of these days and I didn't know whether I should say yes or no...but when he asked me to marry him, I said 'Are you sure?'...then I said 'yes'...

The War

Not long after Mary meeting her future husband, World War II started. Frank enlisted in the Army and was soon stationed overseas. Mary prayed every night for the safe return of her boyfriend. She says that the war was tough on both of them, but they frequently wrote letters to one another, talking about future plans to marry one another. Once he came back to the states, Mary and Frank were married and she never let him go again.

During the war, Mary decided to do her part to support the United States. She quit her job as a beautician in Pennsylvania and became an inspector in factory in Ohio.

During the war, we went to Ohio to work in the factories. Four of us girls decided to go. We worked in the factory during the war. We were inspectors on valves that they had at that time, they probably still have them for automobiles or planes or other kinds of stuff. I guess for buses and things like that. We would check so that there was no bad spots on them and so I was one of the inspectors. If there was anything wrong, it had to be sent back to be finished right or something to it, to make it usable. So I worked in the factory for awhile and I enjoyed that too.

On the side, Mary would style some of coworkers hair and she maintained her haircutting license, in the hopes of returning to a beauty shop after the war. After the war, Mary and her husband settled in Ohio. Frank found a job in a factory working with chemicals and played in a band part-time. Mary found a job at the local five-and-dime and continued to work as a beautician.

Being a Mother

Mary went back to work as a beautician for a few years. After some time, she and Frank decided that they would start a family, so Mary quit her so she could dedicate her time taking care of her children. As she describes it:

I don't like to do two things at one time. I don't like working and raising kids unless I have to, and my husband was making enough for us and I don't spend it that fast, so it will work out.

Ever since she was in high school, Mary wanted to have two children, a boy and a girl. She had had her daughter first, then some time later, she got her wish and had a boy. Mary wanted one of each, because she wanted to experience the joys of raising a boy and a girl. Mary believed that each gender has his or her own unique methods of child-rearing and she wanted to learn all that she could from her children. Her pregnancy was filled with anticipation. Mary remembers:

When my children came and they were without some sickness or anything they would have to put up with the rest of their lives, when they were born...and I saw that they had all their fingers and toes, and everything was in its place, I thanked the Lord. And while I was carrying them I thought goodness gracious, I thought what if something happens, but they turned out to be okay.

After having her two children, Mary and Frank decided that having two children “was enough to worry about.” She instilled into her children the values and beliefs that were taught to her as a child.

Events Prior to the Present

After having her children, Mary continued her life as a homemaker and devoted herself to raising her children. Mary's daughter eventually decided to marry and start her own family, and

her son attended college and earned his degree. Over the years, Mary's daughter had two children of her own and as Mary said "everything worked out great." Mary did not have much to say about this time period in her life. She stated that raising her children was filled with surprises and she enjoyed teaching them the basics about life, but she did not offer more insights about this period of her life.

Prior to conducting this study, Mary's children informed me that her memories centered around this period of her life were uncertain. In my opinion, I believe this "gap" in her life story is indicative of the disease process. This finding corresponds with Opie's (1992) observations as well. When conducting life stories, Opie discovered that some of the participants in his study had difficulty recalling events from middle- and late-adulthood, yet they could recount stories from their childhood with great clarity. In Mary's case, I believe that she may be experiencing the same difficulty. When asked about her brothers and her sister, Mary exhibited difficulty remembering where they lived today and whether or not they were still alive at all. Also, Mary believes that her parents are still alive. Her constant remarks about visiting her parents up north and continually stating that her father still cuts hair, indicate two important aspects. First, this belief helps illustrate the degree in which Alzheimer's disease has impacted Mary's life. Second, it provides evidence that Mary may have difficulty with her memories from mid- and late-adulthood, because that is time period in her life when her parents probably passed away. Thus, if she does have difficulty remembering events from this period of her life, she is more likely to forget about her parent's death and assume that her parents are still alive and doing well.

At some point, Mary and her husband decided to move from Ohio to Blacksburg. Although Mary did not comment on this transition, I believe this relocation occurred at some point after her husband retired from his factory job. I also believe that Mary and her husband settled in this area, because her daughter was here and her daughter wanted to help with the caregiving duties.

Summary

This chapter presented a chronological account of Mary's life, through the use of personal narratives gathered in the interviews. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a holistic perspective of Mary's life. In the next chapter, the each of the following research questions are addressed and discussed:

1. How does Mary perceive herself today, as a woman diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease?
2. What events from her childhood have lead to the person who she is today?
3. What are Mary's perceptions of the present and future, and how did she formulate these perceptions?

The interpretations in chapter five draw heavily from the stories in this chapter. Therefore, that is why these two chapters are presented in this fashion.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusions

Purpose Revisited

In the first chapter, I stated that I wanted to learn more about the aging process as a whole. However, as I started my study, I noticed that my purpose transformed from gaining a broad understanding of the aging process to understanding what a life history is and why it can be a valuable tool for conducting research. Specifically, I learned about Mary's life history and how her past played an integral part in identity development and the manner in which she viewed life in her later years. Although my overview of this study changed, my three research questions remained the same:

1. How does Mary perceive herself today, as a woman diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease?
2. What events from her childhood have led to the person who she is today?
3. What are Mary's perceptions of the present and future, and how did she formulate these perceptions?

I will address each of these questions separately and then offer insights into the findings that I discovered in the guided interview process.

How does Mary Perceive Herself Today, as a Woman Diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease?

Throughout the study, I noticed that Mary rarely talked about her diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or the disease process itself. She perceives herself to be in good health, but also as a person who has her ups and downs. When I asked her about her thoughts on the process of collecting her life story, she said:

I thought about that the other night. I said one way your job doing this is learning how people cope with different things in their life. I says if he wants to know how people get along and do the things that they do to make them happy. I enjoy talking to you and sharing what a wonderful life I had...and still have.

Nothing more was ever mentioned about her prognosis, other than the occasional comment that this "little brain can't hold everything" or "you kinda have to go in and out the window to get answers, because sometimes it stops and sometimes it don't", meaning that she views her memory as uncertain at times. Nonetheless, the interview process itself gave me an insight to what the aging process must be like.

Evidence of the Disease Process

Mary never once spoke about her disease or as a person diagnosed with the disease. Yet,

there were times when the disease process manifested itself throughout the interviews. Often, Mary would repeat the same stories about her childhood. One of her favorite stories concerned her intentions to become a beautician and her father's hesitation to support her career choice. Also, I noticed that Mary would ask me questions about myself, only to repeat the question a few minutes later. These actions show the loss of short-term memory, but I believe her memories of childhood are fairly accurate. Her stories about working in the confectionery store and entering beauty school remained relatively the same every time she told them. From the first interview session, to the last, her narratives stayed the same, except for minor expansions (or deletions) of detail in the stories.

Mary would also ask me what my name was and she would ask me about my future career plans. I found myself repeating my name and goals several times in each interview. It was obvious that she knew that I had some connection to the university, but she did not retain my name. Also, I was asked to write down my name and address after each interview session. I believe that Mary wanted some type of written record or account that she could use as a cue, though I cannot conclusively prove this. Mary often asked how I came to know her, and I told her multiple times in each interview about how we worked together during the intergenerational activities.

Another key element that stood out in the interview process was Mary's belief that her parent's are still alive. I was warned by her daughter and son that she still perceives them as a living and active part of her life. Perhaps Mary sees them as an integral part of her life now, because of her relationship that she had with her father. Mary may be able to cope better with the disease, by simply perceiving her father as an available resource for her to turn to when she needs him. Mary also showed some difficulty describing her siblings and her son. This is a normative process in Alzheimer's disease. People with Alzheimer's disease tend to get easily confuse when addressing family members and friends, who do not maintain frequent contact. With Mary, she would refer to a picture of her brother as her son. This did not occur in one situation, but was repeated throughout the first interview that we did together.

I believe that though I was not able to directly address what it is like to be a person with Alzheimer's, I was able to get a feel for the process. As evident in most of the popular literature, people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease view the disease process differently. Some people

talk about their emotions and experiences (Henderson & Andrews, 1998), whereas others view it as ‘their problem’ and do not feel comfortable sharing their ‘problems’ with others. This is the case with Mary, because ever since she was a child, she was engrained with the philosophy: “Don’t tell anybody your problems, because they have enough of their own.”

Aside from the disease process, Mary is wonderfully optimistic about life. She feels at total peace with herself, because she is “happy with the way things turned out with my husband and I am happy with my children and the way they turned out.” Mary sees herself as a successful mother, because her children turned out to be good kids and they have started their own families. Mary says that she has a good perspective on life because she got to do everything that she ever wanted to do. Again, this notion relates back to her belief that her children are doing well, because she raised them well.

What Events from Her Childhood have Lead to the Person Mary is Today?

From the first interview session with Mary, it was evident that many of her experiences in childhood helped shape the person she is today. Mary recounted several stories about her childhood and was able to tell and retell her stories with conveyance and detail. Although each story has a different setting and a different application, I noticed the emergence of five prominent themes in Mary’s life. I conferred with Dr. Stremmel about the reliability of these themes, who concurred with my assessment. I have dubbed these themes as follows: Daddy’s Little Girl, The Sage, Mary’s Career, Being a Mother, and The Loving Wife. Each of these themes builds off one another to provide a holistic understanding of how her childhood experiences helped shape her into the person she is today. I will address each of themes separately and discuss the relationship that each theme has to Mary’s life today.

Daddy’s Little Girl

Mary’s relationship with her father is *the* most pronounced theme in her life story. Mary mentions her father in almost every context of her life, from working in the confectionery store to establishing a career as a beautician. From the interviews, it is evident that Mary and her father shared a special connection with one another. She valued his wisdom and heeded his advice without question. Mary’s interviews were constantly riddled with the phrase “My daddy taught me...” or “my daddy said...”

Mary’s earliest memories of her father are anchored around the confectionery store. He was very careful to help Mary understand the basics when dealing with customers. ‘Being

pleasant' and saying 'May I help you' were two pieces of advice that were essential to her father. He instilled in her the value of the customer and the basic psychology people must have when providing a service to consumers. Her father's witty phrases and candid advice have helped Mary achieve a more altruistic self. She was always told to be helpful and kind to people.

At times Mary's father would become angry if she did not adhere to his advice. Mary says that his favorite phrase was "Ty Tak, He Tak" meaning 'This way, not that way.' She said he would often say to her 'it's the way I tell you.' Essentially, Mary's father wanted to teach his children a good work ethic and he did not want them to 'cut corners.' To this day, Mary appreciates the values that he instilled in her and she appreciates his guidance that he gave her. This has helped her guide her own children.

The Sage

As the sage, Mary imparts her wisdom that she learned from her parents to others, particularly her children. She has always let her children know that "you're always welcome to ask questions if you don't know the answer or what to do about a situation." Mary readily shares wisdom on how to deal with people or how to approach a situation. The wisdom that she shares is a culmination of her experiences, as well as the knowledge that she retains from her father. One good example, is her philosophy of school. In one interview, I asked Mary if she ever skipped school. Her response was:

I never said 'Gee, I'm going to pretend I'm sick today, because I don't want to go.' I never had that thought. I could not wait until I could go back to school. I think that that helps to make you feel observant, pay attention, when tests come, you get a good mark. Then you know that you're doing the right thing and if you didn't do that, then you wouldn't be happy. I even taught my kids that. Learn all you can!

This response is not surprising considering that her father told her as they were growing up, "He says 'I didn't have that opportunity. I didn't go to school.' I want you to have your education and we all got our education."

Another important area that Mary shares with people concerns religion. Mary is a devout Catholic and has a strong faith in God. In many of the interviews, she talked about her faith as a guiding path to help her overcome difficult situations, such as being separated from her husband during World War II. She even goes so far as to say that she believes people are wrong if they do not believe in God. As a child, faith was a strong value in her house. During Christmas her family would only eat soup and bread and would attend midnight mass. As she said before "He

[God] has helped me millions and millions of times. I always turn to Him to keep me going and always given the right answer...” When asked to give a summation of what she would impart to others, Mary said “Observe all you can...pay attention to your teachers, be pleasant...and don’t anything out of anger that you might regret the rest of your life.”

I do not wish to paint the picture of Mary as just being a person who dispensed knowledge, Mary sees herself as a life-long learner as well. She stated in one interview, “From my daddy and my teachers and my kids I learned an awful lot, because there was something that you didn’t know and they taught me and it all worked out.” Mary constantly engages people as an active learner. In fact, she and her family refer to Virginia Tech Adult Day Services as ‘going to school.’ In an informal interview with her daughter, I was told that Mary loves attending adult day services, because she loves learning new things from the staff and other participants.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, Mary enjoyed “teaching” the preschool children when they interacted with the participants. Mary’s daughter reported that Mary would come home and tell her daughter that she was the teacher, because she read to the children and helped them with various activities. In fact, there came a point, that Mary started bringing her “teacher” bag to adult day services, and would wait in anticipation for the children to visit, so she could interact with them.

Mary’s Career

Mary constantly told and retold the story about her career choice in young adulthood. Becoming a beautician was a very important aspect in Mary’s life. First, she wanted to have a career much like her father’s. When she worked in the confectionery store, she would watch her father engage his customers in a variety of conversations. She was amazed at the level of knowledge that her father had when he spoke to them about a variety of topics. Mary said that her father constantly learned things from his customers. She was proud of her father for being so knowledgeable with so little formal education. Also, there were times when she would in the barbershop and cut people’s hair. This form of mentoring was important to her and helped her shape her career path.

Imbedded in her beauty school story, Mary also mentions her father’s initial disapproval. Her father was skeptical about “using electricity on the hair.” He did not want his daughter to become a beautician if she was going to place herself in danger of being fined or going to jail, in case she burned a customer’s hair. Unlike barbering, being a beautician involved using

chemicals and electricity, and this made her father nervous. So, her father wanted to find out more about the process of becoming a beautician, and he interviewed some of the local beauticians in his town to learn more. Once he found out more about the profession, he said ‘I guess you can go to beauty school.’ [and I said] ‘Oh, Thank you daddy.’

Getting her father’s approval was important to Mary for several reasons. First and foremost, Mary’s father paid for education in beauty school. She needed her father’s support to help her attend beauty school. More importantly though, Mary wanted a profession similar to her father’s so she could experience some of the things he experienced as a barber. For example, engaging the customers, learning about new things, and being able to provide a service to people that they would enjoy. Mary loved learning and viewed her father’s experiences as getting an informal education every time he talked to a customer. Once her father gave his approval and made sure that Mary would never become bored with the profession, she was elated. She studied hard in beauty school, practiced hairstyles on her friends, and strove to do her best and make her father proud.

Another factor in this theme concerns Mary’s cultural background. Mary was told about the hardships her parents and grandparents faced when they lived in Czechoslovakia. All they could do was farm, but when they immigrated to the United States, they could “decide what you really wanted to do.” Having the choice to be or do anything you want for a job or a career, helped empower Mary’s decision to be a beautician. As a child, Mary would visit her grandmother’s farm and help her uncles tend to the farming chores. Throughout the interviews, Mary said that she would never want to become a farmer, because there was always work to be done. This experience, coupled with her father’s stories about not having opportunities in Czechoslovakia gave a Mary a better appreciation of what it meant to choose a career.

Being a Mother

Another important theme in Mary’s life, was being a mother. Mary loved her children dearly and wanted to do her best to raise them as “good kids.” She instilled the values in her children that were instilled in her as a child. Like her mother, Mary was the disciplinarian in the household. She says she would spank her children they did bad deeds, to help them learn the consequences of their actions. Mary wanted to have a boy and a girl, so she could learn how to treat them. She wanted the experience of raising a boy and a girl, so she could compare and contrast child-rearing strategies that she used for each.

When asked what was the single most important thing that she gave to her children she said “giving them an education...helping them pick out a career.” Mary wanted to give her children all that she could, so they would have a happy and fulfilled life. Her father taught her that having an education was a key to having the ability to choose a career and she wanted to instill this value on her children. She wanted them to have the opportunity to pick a career that would keep them engaged and happy. This scenario mirrored her father’s advice that he gave her when she told him that she wanted to be a beautician.

Another aspect to having children, concerns the ability to pass knowledge to her children, so they in turn will pass the same knowledge to their children. When asked about being a grandmother, Mary was happy that her daughter was teaching her children the values that Mary had taught her. This process of passing down information is important to Mary, because she wants her grandchildren to live happy and fulfilled lives, like she does.

The Loving Wife

When Mary started dating her husband, she knew that he was a “good guy” to marry. She had another boyfriend before she met Frank. This other boyfriend was the brother of one of her best friends; but, Mary said “I just couldn’t see myself marrying him.” She said that he was a poor conversationalist and “although he was a nice guy,” she just could not see herself marrying him. She and her husband always have something to talk about. She loves him dearly and is so happy that she married the “right guy.”

Her role as a wife is noted throughout the interview process. Mary says that she was careful about who she married, because she wanted to have a relationship like her parent’s relationship. Her parents got along great and were always able to work out problems. Mary said that she wanted a guy she could talk to, and a guy who would treat her well. Mary also considers her husband to be her best friend. Whenever he would work double shifts, working in the factory and playing in the band, Mary would let him sleep in and not be disturbed. She assumed a caregiver role for her husband when he was exhausted and she always looked after him. Before marrying Frank though, Mary wanted her parent’s approval. She said “they liked the way he moved and watched his motions and the way he talked everyday.” This was important to her, because she wanted her parents to accept her future husband into their family. I also believe that her husband’s family origin, being Polish, helped with his acceptance into her family. Although Mary never stated this, she often talks about her husband’s Polish background and his

participation in a polka band.

Mary cherishes their relationship as husband and wife. She refers to Frank as her “Hunny” and she always commenting on how well they get along. Now that Mary has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, she has indirectly talked about the change of roles. She describes him as taking care of her and “driving me to school” (referring to her attendance at adult day services). Mary alluded to other role changes as well. When she talked about the beginning of the marriage, she mentioned how it was her job to do housework and take care of the children. She said that her husband worked two jobs so he could support the family. Today, Mary describes her husband as a “good helper,” because he is constantly helping her perform daily chores, such as cooking and cleaning. It is difficult to speculate about his involvement in these daily activities, but I believe that it is a culmination of post-retirement behavior and role submersion as a caregiver for his wife.

What are Mary’s Perceptions of the Present and Future and how did She Formulate these Perceptions?

Today, Mary is a participant at Adult Day Services. Mary says that her son and daughter constantly keep in touch with her and they call her for advice.

I’m so happy, we’re getting up in age now it’s nice to know that I have raised two kids that are doing well and taking care jobs and their life respectfully. If I thought if they were doing something against the law or doing something that might someone unhappy, then I wold say that I was failure. I think I did a good job and they respect me.

Mary reminds her children that she always willing to talk to them and help them out in way she can. She is proud that both of her children are married and that both of them are happy with their lives. She also proud to be a grandmother and have the opportunity to watch them grow into wonderful, young adults.

Mary feels as though she is always in contact with her children and her siblings. Although she does not see her son and grandchildren as often as she used to, she understands that as people age, they tend to do their own things. She says, “they call and write...and even now, I still ask how things are going.” Mary is very proud of her children and she has complete confidence in herself that she raised her children “pretty well.” As for her bother and sister, Mary says:

We correspond with one another and we keep in touch and try to visit one another.

I told them recently I guess that we're getting up in age you know and maybe you're not, but we are, we meaning me, and they just kept trying to keep in touch with one another as often as can, because we don't know how long we are going to be around. They always have something against that because I'm not supposed to be thinking about dying and I'm supposed to keep on living...

Mary's life today can be summed in two sentences: "Everything is going well and everything and I'm glad that the good Lord helped me along. That's the way I look at life."

When asked about the future, Mary has little to say. In a sense, Mary would rather focus on her past accomplishments, rather than dwell on possible accomplishments. As a person in her early 80's, Mary would rather be a passive observer of life, than an active planner. She says:

I just look at things as they come. I don't like to try to think about something too far in the future. When time goes by, I think of it and about things I would like to do...Although I am still interested in things that go on, I would like to go and watch. I don't like to participate at my age now...I just have kinda calm down and don't try to things pile up on you that you want to do and you know that you won't be able to do those, because time goes by, if you have enough time to start and finish it, do it. If not, forget it. I figure this way, it's no point in trying to get your mind and your body into doing things that maybe will upset you in the future and then be sorry that you ever did it or something like that then because you may not have the time or something like that. I have to say about the future, now that I have accomplished the things that I want to, I just...thank the Lord everyday for helping me out and that he gave me the strength to do all the things. I'm happy and my husband and I are both happy and our marriage is just going great and everything is very well. Just that I thank the Lord everyday for helping me out and helping them out to accomplish what they want to do.

To help extend Mary's perceptions of her present state, I will apply her current situation to the Dynamical Identity Model.

Mary Today and Applications to the Dynamical Identity Model

The Dynamical Identity Model is adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model with an emphasis on Dynamic Systems Theory. This Model encompasses seven key constructs that interact with one another to form a person's identity. Each of these constructs will be examined as they pertain to Mary and the creation of the predominate construct, known as the core.

Core

The core represents the culmination of the other systems and the final product of the

person. In Mary's case, her core represents the wife, mother, daughter, worker, and advice giver. She is at total peace with herself and represents a person who has judged herself as living a meaningful and worthy life.

Microsystem

The microsystem consists of the immediate people that Mary interacts with. From her interviews, it is evident that she has an active role as a wife and a mother. Also, it is interesting to note that she sees herself as an active agent in her father's life, because she said phrases such "we still go up and visit them (referring to her mother and father). Another key element in Mary's microsystem is her home and the Virginia Tech Adult Day Services. She perceives herself as going to school at adult day services and constantly refers this in her interviews.

These microsystem concepts have a direct impact on her core. I note earlier that Mary loved school and, thus, it is understandable that she would perceive adult day services as "going to school." Also, her relationship with her father and perceived continuing relationship with her father have made a great impact on her core and the manner in which she sees herself as "daddy's little girl." Her relationship as a mother and wife are evident with her constant contact with her husband and daughter.

Mesosystem

Mesosystem links in Mary's life are not as clear. Her husband and daughter have well defined links to Virginia Tech Adult Day Services, and are actively involved in Mary's progress. Other than that, it was difficult to assess her linkages from the interviews.

Exosystem

The exosystem, concerns various concepts that may influence the microsystem, but the person does not actively engage in. In Mary's interviews, she often talked about 'other' families and the problems they had. For example, in one interview, Mary said that she was glad that her children never got into legal trouble, like so many other families that she knew. She instilled in her children specific life philosophies that helped them avoid these issues. Also, as she talked to her customers, Mary would learn vicariously from their mistakes and use this knowledge to help her family if they were ever faced with a similar situation. As for her neighbors, Mary does not interact with her neighbors much since she moved to her current residence.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem examines the cultural context in which all of the other systems reside.

In this study, the macrosystem was evident in Mary's current identity. Mary's Slovak background is an aspect of her self, of which she is particularly proud. Watching her father start his own business without any formal education, and being successful in that business helped Mary realize understand the significance of the country she lived in, and the country from which her parents came. Family and education were two of the central ideals from her childhood, and it was these ideals that shaped her identity into what it is today. Also, the macrosystem embodies the ideologies that were instilled into her as a child. As discussed previously in this chapter, the values taught to her as a child contribute significantly to who she is today.

Chronosystem

This system, accounts for the current sociohistorical context, as well the varying degrees of sociohistorical context in the past. This system in Mary's life represents how Mary perceives today, the overall view of society. We did not discuss here current views of society in the interview session, therefore it is difficult to comment on this particular system. We did discuss the past sociohistorical events in her life and the effects they had on her life. First, Mary talked about the Great Depression. She reflected back on the Great Depression and remembered how times were tough. She stated that her father had difficulty maintaining his shop, because of the reduced number of clientele. But, she and her family were able to manage because of the income from the confectionery. World War II greatly impacted Mary's life as well. The war caused the separation between her and her husband Frank. Also, Mary changed careers during the war to help make an effort to support the war. She worked as an inspector at a factory that produced valves for the military.

This example illustrates how a larger aspect of the culture, the war, greatly impacted Mary's life. The war changed Mary's career path and living arrangements. Mary never lived on her own, until she moved to Ohio with her friends. Also, after the war, Mary decided to remain in Ohio and did not move back home to Pennsylvania. The war altered her lifestyle in many ways and made lasting alterations on her life.

Integrating the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective to Further Expand Mary's Identity Today

The symbolic interactionist perspective takes a different approach to Mary's identity formation. Blumer (1969) believed that people are conscious actors in their environment and constantly assume the roles of others to gain a better understanding of the world around them. In

Mary's situation, she would often use a narrative speech pattern that would reflect a conversation from her father's point of view. Here is an example of how Mary assumed the role of her father:

When that customer left, he would come in there “Didn't I tell you how to treat the customers?” He came into the next room and say “What do you think they think of you? And what do you think they think of me for not reprimanding you? So, straighten up and fly right.”

Mary would often cite conversations between she and her father such as this, and the consequences of that conversation. Mary's life philosophy is heavily based from her interactions with her father. Blumer (1969) stated that people formulate meanings through interactions with others. Mary's constant referral to her father indicated the impact that he had on her identity development. Another example would be Mary's philosophy about education and her altruism. Throughout her childhood, her father told her to “always be pleasant” and she was impressed of his ability to run a business without any formal education.

Another application to symbolic interactionism, is Mary's ability to reflect back on her life with such a positive attitude (Kart, 1997). Kart claims that a life review can help older adults gain a better perspective of the world around them. When asked about the interview process, Mary said “I enjoy talking to you and sharing what a wonderful life I had...and still have.” Also, Mary made a comment in one of the interviews stating that she was surprised that she could remember so much and that she had never really organized her thoughts in such a manner. So, from this perspective, we can see how Mary would shape her thoughts and adjust her understanding of the self through interactions.

Speculations Pertaining to the Dynamical Identity Model

At some point in Mary's life, she may start seeing a blur between systems as they approach collapse. The first system that may start collapsing is her chronosystem. Many times, as people progress with Alzheimer's disease, they begin to lose their reference to the surrounding world. Mary did not have a good grasp of her age, nor did she have a grasp of the dates when certain events occurred, such as when her parents migrated to the United States, what grades she attended at what schools, and so forth. I would expect to see a progression in the deterioration of this until she loses the basic concepts of time, such as the current day, date, and year. Typically after the chronosystem, there would be a collapse of the macrosystem. In Mary's case, I believe that the macrosystem will remain intact for a fairly long period of time.

The macrosystem embodies ideology and culture. We know that Mary is a first

generation immigrant and she is proud of her heritage. Unlike many Americans, she knows her ‘roots’ so to speak and is proud of her Slovak heritage. Mary has shown the uncanny ability to act as a sage and share her wisdom and knowledge with people. This philosophy, of being pleasant to people and helping people out, has been well engrained into her core. Teaching people and helping people with their problems is heavily embedded into her identity as a person. Therefore, I would predict that this system will remain intact, but it might not protect the erosion of other systems, such as the exosystem or the mesosystem.

I believe that the exosystem will begin to erode as the entire ecological system becomes stretched in the vortex. I believe Mary will focus her attention away from having a passive involvement in groups and concentrate more on her immediate family: her children, her husband, and her father.

I further believe the mesosystem will erode prior to the collapse of the macrosystem. The links that Mary’s activities have with people and events in her microsystem will begin to blur as the disease process progresses. Mary might begin confusing immediate family members with extended kin or vice versa. Also, the deterioration of the mesosystem might lead to more confusion when Mary tries to discriminate between the exo- and the microsystems. Again, this process of deterioration may occur before the breakdown of the macrosystem begins.

I predict that the microsystem will be the last system to collapse. Mary has a strong relationship with her husband, her children, and her father (who she still perceives as living). She sees herself as a resource for her children and she relates strongly to both her husband and her father. This collapse will probably start occurring after the breakdown of the macrosystem, thus occurring much later in the disease process.

As the microsystem slowly collapses under the pressure of the other systems, the core will be eventually breached. The breach of the core may trigger a total collapse, but I would estimate that the core will slowly deteriorate and not undergo a complete systems breakdown. I base my assumption on the belief that Mary has a strong core. She was reared in an environment that deeply instilled certain values and beliefs in her core. These beliefs are also linked with the strong connection that Mary has with her family, thus strengthening her microsystem. In addition, Mary’s positive outlook about life and the belief systems themselves have helped Mary retain a strong sense of self.

The Relationship of the Findings to Previous Research

The results of this study are indicative to the concepts introduced by Kaufman (1986). Kaufman states that identity formation tends to remain continuous and stable over the life span. For example, Mary constantly refers to her past experiences and makes inferences about how they impacted her life today. My study validates Kaufman's belief that past events serve as sources of meaning. Kaufman stated "the social economic status of childhood, family ties, education, geographic mobility, and work figure prominently and most often in the life stories..." (p. 86). Again, the results of this study practically mirror Kaufman's research on life studies. As Kaufman said, these areas tend to be the most subjective and meaningful events in an adult's life.

This study also corroborates the findings of Sokolovsky (1996). Sokolovsky interviewed a Russian immigrant woman and discovered that she displayed a high amount of altruism. I discovered that Mary, a first-generation immigrant, also displayed a high amount of altruism. Mary was often concerned about the well-being of her family and encouraged her family to seek her assistance if they needed any help. Sokolovsky also found that culture can serve as a key for establishing identity and relating to a particular cultural group. In this study, Mary constantly refers to her parents and her family of origin. Throughout the study, Mary also talks about the comparisons between the United States and Czechoslovakia, based from her parent's accounts.

In the study by Henderson and Andrews (1998), Henderson rarely talked about his disease process to his family. Yet, he showed in his memoirs that he constantly reflected on the disease process, when he entered journals into his diary. In this study, Mary never spoke about the disease process or the fact that she had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Yet, when asked about the interview process as a whole, she commented that she wanted to help others by sharing how she herself coped with "different things in their life." In Davis' (1989) reflection, he and his wife drew heavily on faith as a guide to cope with the disease process. As noted throughout this study, Mary is a devout Catholic and sees God as a parent who guides her.

Implications for Future Research

There are few if any empirical studies that have examined the identity formation and development of older adults diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Due to most journal restrictions, very few of these studies are published because of their length. Studies, such as this one, can be beneficial for at least three reasons. First, this study is one a few existing studies that has created a model that could be applicable to the identity formation of people diagnosed with

Alzheimer's disease. The Dynamical Identity Model is my attempt to integrate existing literature and theory into a basic, testable model. Second, this study can be viewed as an exploratory attempt to investigate the identity formation process of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Most of the literature focusing on the actual person diagnosed with the disease, is located in the popular literature. Third, this study used a relatively new methodological technique in the field of gerontology, the life history approach. The life history method is not new in the field of education or in the field of psychohistory. This approach could be used as a basis to conduct future research and offer more exploratory advances to understanding the disease and the effects of the disease process. Utilizing this methodological approach has its advantages in being able to gain a holistic understanding of human behavior, rather than quantifying human interactions and researching shared global characteristics.

This study also brought to life other questions. First, is the Dynamical Identity an accurate account of the concept of identity. To test this model, I would have to interview more people and collect several more life histories. The model should incorporate people of all ages and health conditions. Second, questions about Mary's past come to light. Throughout the interview process, Mary never talked about her life after the birth of her children. This lack of content made it difficult to provide a precise account for Mary's life story. Also, this lack of information made it difficult to apply the dynamical identity model to past events. Third, this study did not investigate the possible discrepancies between Mary's perceptions about certain life events and her husband's and children's interpretations of the same events. Any discrepancies could have offered insight into Mary's thoughts.

Insights and Individual Development

The beauty of telling a story such as this is not necessarily to find similarities between other stories and other studies, but rather to focus on the story, Mary's story, in its entirety. The goal of sharing this story with others is so that they too can read the story and relate to various passages. Mary's life is full of excitement from the standpoint of knowing "this could be me." Her tales about the Great Depression and World War II show us the perspective of what it means to be a "regular" person during those times.

I thoroughly enjoyed talking to Mary and listening to the stories that she shared with me. I know, that once I started the transcriptions, I started to re-evaluate my own life and the things I hold dear. I keep thinking to myself, 'will I be as peaceful and happy when (and if) I reach my

80s?’ I hope that I do, but I would like to have an assurance that I will be able to accomplish everything that I want to accomplish before I die. I realize life is filled with disappointments, but I also know that if you try your best and do all that you can, you should be proud of putting your best effort. Mary’s philosophy on life really changed my life. Her attitudes about being pleasant and helpful made me rethink my altruistic attitudes towards others. Also, her religious convictions made me question my own faith and understanding of God. Listening to her talk about God as a parent and as a source of inspiration and guidance, made me reflect on my own beliefs.

Mary is a remarkable woman, and a woman I will never forget. I remember, in several interviews, how Mary would reverse my questions back to me. I found myself, the interviewer, now being the interviewee. I enjoyed talking to Mary, as if she was my own grandmother. I know already thanked her in the acknowledgments, but I just wanted to end this study by saying again: Mary, thank you. Thank you for sharing your life with me and thank you for giving me a new insight to my own life.

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FIGURES

FIGURE 1

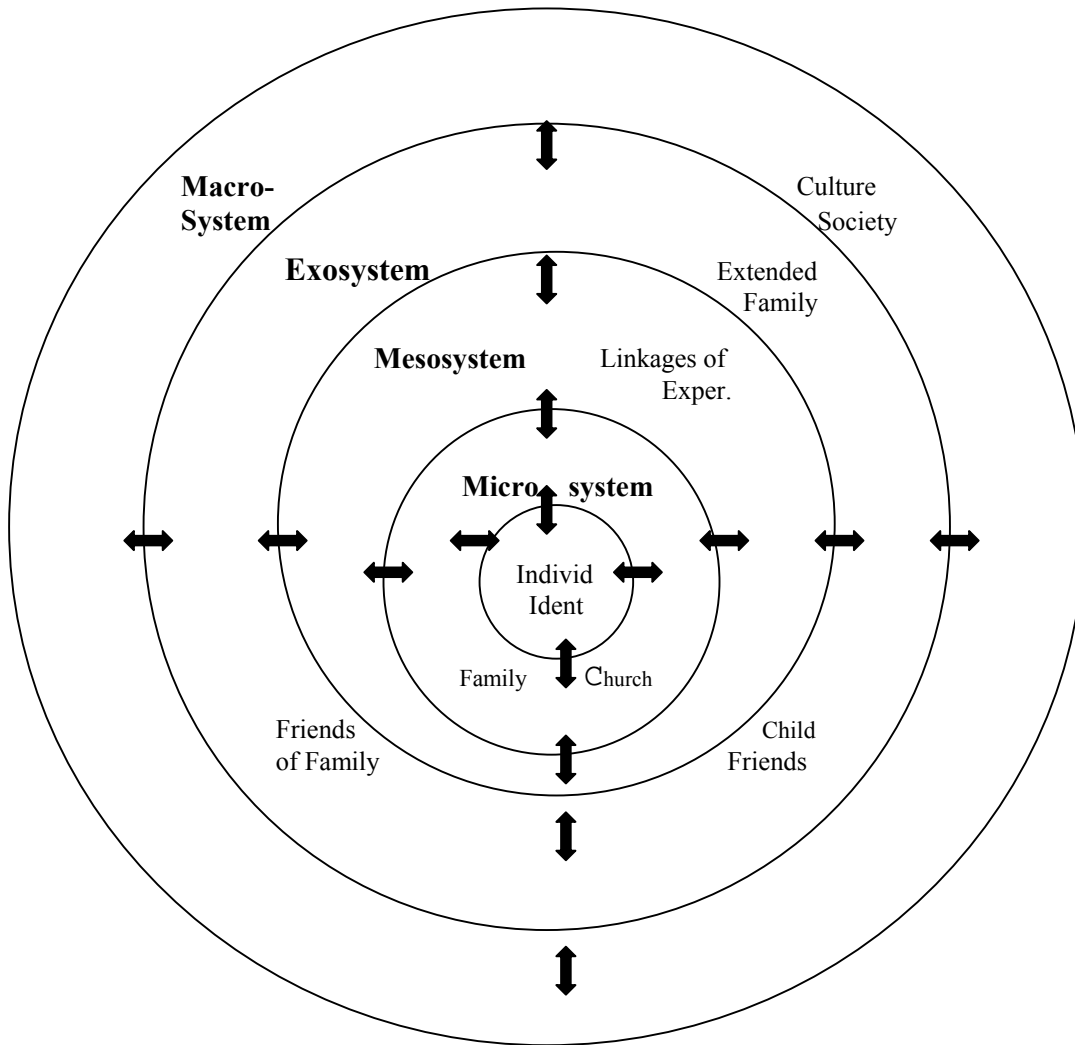


FIGURE 2

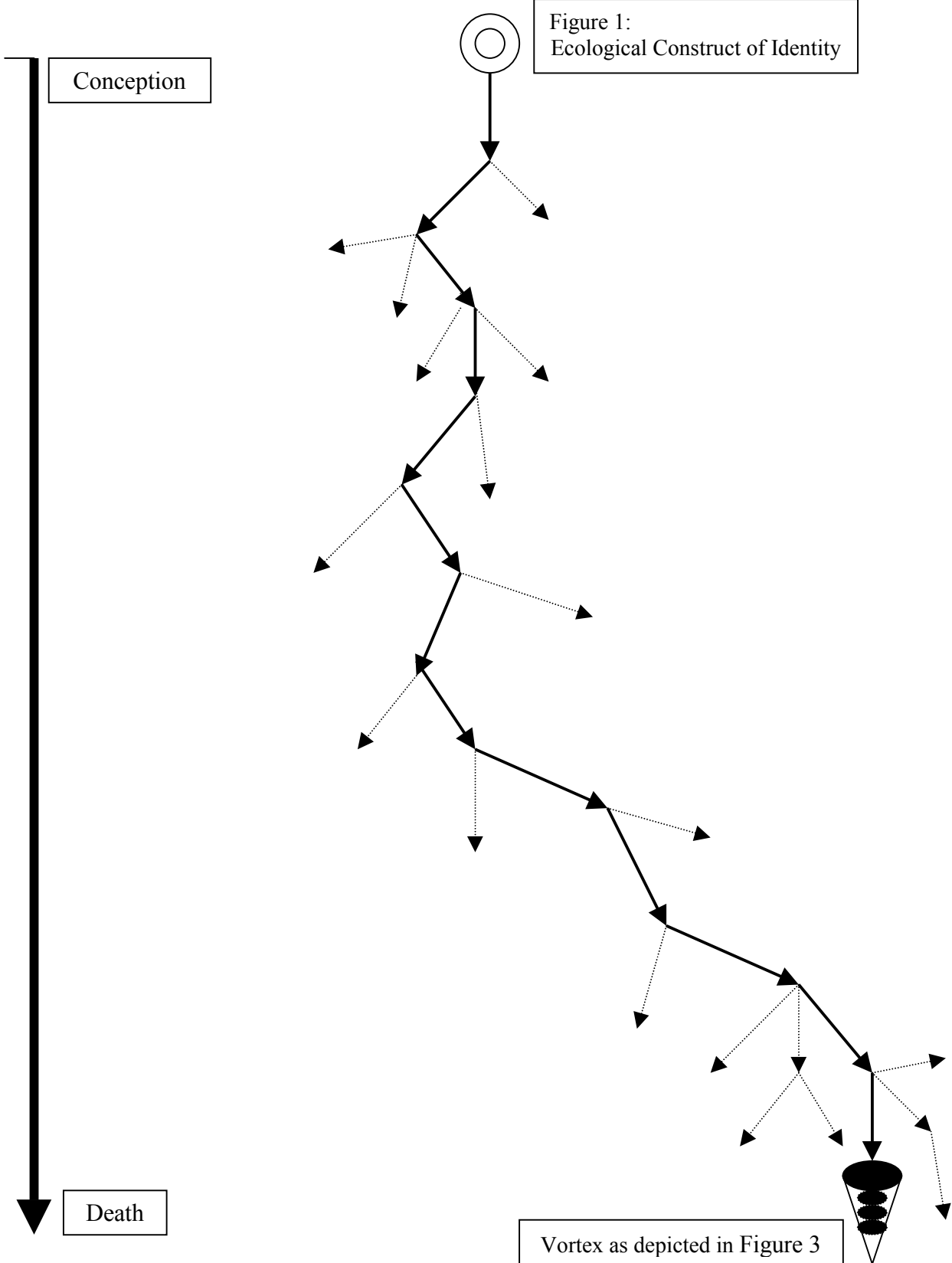
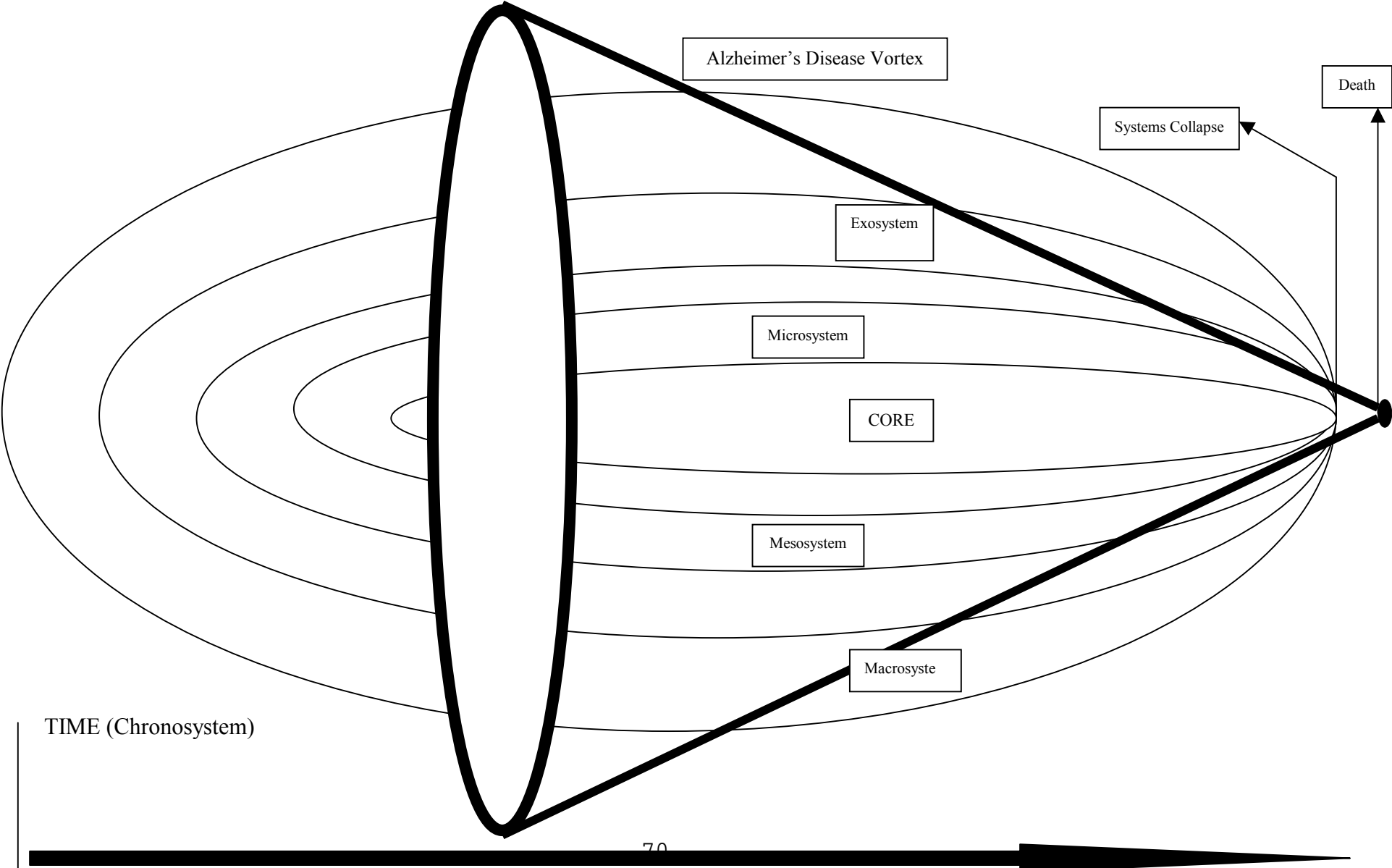


FIGURE 3



APPENDIX A

Interview Questions as adapted from Atkinson (1998):

What was going on with your family, your community, and the world at the time of your birth?

Were you ever told anything unusual about your birth?

What are some of your earliest memories about life?

Did you know your grandparents? If so, what characteristics do you remember most about them?

How would you describe your parents?

What are some specific things you remember about your mother?

What are some specific things you remember about your father?

What are some of the best and worst things you remember about them?

What do you think that you inherited from them?

How do you feel now as you talk about them?

What is the ethnic and cultural background of your parents?

Were you ever told about any stories of any of your family immigrating to the United States?

What did you do differently in your house because of your culture that other people may not have done (i.e. special meals/food items, certain family traditions, how celebrate weddings, etc.)?

Which of these traditions are (were) most important to you? Why?

What was growing up in your house and neighborhood like for you?

What are some early memories around cultural differences?

Was your family different from other families in your neighborhood?

What cultural values were passed to you and by whom...what cultural differences have you passed down?

Was religion important to your family?

How would you describe the religious atmosphere in your home?

Did you attend religious ceremonies as a child and as a youth?

Was religion important to you as a child?

Is religion important to you today?

What do you remember most about growing up?

Were you encouraged to try new things or did you feel held back?

Did you feel nurtured as a child?

Do you get along with your family members?

Did your parents spend enough time with you?

What did you do with your time?

What were some of the struggles that you faced as a child?

What is one of the saddest moments you remember as a child?

What are some of the things that you were thankful for as a child?

What are some of the happiest moments that you can recall?

How was discipline handled in your home?

What would you say was the most significant event in your life up to the age 12?

Did you make friends easily?

Who were some of your best childhood friends?

What pressures did you feel as a teenager and where did they come from?

How did you handle them?

What clubs, organizations, or groups did you join in school?

What did you do for entertainment or for fun as a teenager?
 What was something you did in your teen years that got you into trouble?
 What was the most significant event in your teenage years?
 What was being a teenager like for you? The best part? The worst part?
 What was your first experience of leaving home?
 What special people have you known in your life?
 Who shaped and influenced your life the most?
 Who are the heroes and heroines in your life?
 Who helped you the most to develop the current understanding that you have for yourself?
 What was your first memory of attending school?
 Did you enjoy school in the beginning?
 What do you remember most about elementary school?
 Who were some of your favorite teachers...in elementary, middle school, junior high, & high?
 How did they influence you?
 What are your best memories of school?
 What are your worst memories?
 What accomplishments in school are you the most proud of?
 How far did you go for formal education?
 What was the most important course you took in school?
 What has been the most important lesson of your life outside of school?
 Do you remember your first date?
 What was the most difficult thing about dating?
 Do you have any humorous stories about your dating experience?
 How did you meet your husband?
 How would you describe your courtship with him?
 What was it about him that made you fall in love with him?
 What are some of the happiest times on your marriage?
 What were some of the most difficult times in your marriage?
 What are your children like?
 What roles do they play in your life?
 What values or lessons do you try to impart on them?
 Did you have any dreams or ambitions as a child? an adolescent?
 Where did they come from?
 What did you want to be when you were in high school?
 Did you do what you wanted do or did your ambitions change?
 What were hopes and dreams as you entered adulthood?
 How did you end up in the line of work that you choose as a career?
 Was your work satisfying to you?
 What were the best and worst aspects of you job?
 When did you realize that you became an adult?
 What was the most historical event that you participated in?
 Do you remember what you were doing during some of the more important dates in United States history (i.e. Pearl Harbor, first moon landing, JFK assassination)

What is the most important thing given to you by your family?
 What is the most important thing that you gave your family?
 How do you feel now that you don't work anymore?
 What do you do with your time now?
 Is there anything you miss about work?
 What are best/worst parts about being retired?
 Do you have any grandchildren?
 Do you spend time with them or see them often?
 What do you enjoy most about your grandchildren?
 What do you enjoy least?
 What do you hope to pass along to your grandchildren?
 How would describe yourself as a child?
 Did you feel loved as a child?
 Did you have any deep thoughts or inner dreams as a teenager?
 What was it like to turn 30, 40, 50, 60, 70?
 What primary beliefs guide your life?
 Do you have a concept of God or a higher power?
 What are those concepts or qualities?
 Do you feel as though you have an inner strength?
 Where does it come from?
 In what ways do you consider yourself to be strong?
 How would you renew your strength if you felt 'drained'?
 What values would you not want to compromise?
 What do you see as the purpose of life?
 How would (did) you achieve this purpose?
 Do ever have doubts about achieving this purpose? How did you overcome these doubts?
 What single experience has given you the greatest amount of joy?
 Do you think there is suffering this world? Why?
 How do you think we, as a society can alleviate this suffering?
 What do you see as the highest ideal that we, as people, can strive for?
 Do you feel that you are in control of your life?
 Do you feel at peace with yourself?
 How did you achieve this?
 What aspects of life are still important for you?
 What were the crucial decisions in your life?
 What has been the most important learning experience in your life?
 What did it teach you?
 Have there been any mistakes or regrets in your life?
 How have you overcome and learned from your difficulties?
 How do you handle disappointment?
 Are you satisfied with the choices that you have made in life?
 Would you change any?
 What has been the happiest time in your life?
 What has been the least happiest time in your life?

What relationships in life have been the most significant?
How would you describe those relationships?
What have been your greatest accomplishments?
Is there anything in life that you absolutely certain of?
What are some things that you hope you never forget?
How do you feel about yourself at the age that you are now?
What is your biggest worry now?
How do you plan to overcome it or cope with it?
In what ways are you changing now?
Are you happy or dissatisfied with the changes?
What has been the greatest challenge of your life so far?
What has been the most awe-inspiring experience of you life?
What one sentiment or emotion makes you feel the most alive?
What matters the most to you now?
What time of your life would you like to repeat?
What most important thing have you had to learn by yourself?
How would you describe yourself TO YOURSELF at this point in your life?
How do think other people perceive you?
Is the way you see yourself now different than the way you saw yourself in the past?
When you think of the future what makes you feel the most uneasy?
What makes you feel the most hopeful?
Is your life fulfilled yet?
Are there other things in your life you would like to do to make it more complete?
What do you see for yourself in the future 5 years from now?
How do you view death?
What do you want to experience most before death?
What advice would you give to younger people or people my age?
Is there anything that we have left out of your life story that you like to include?
Do you feel as though you have given a fair picture of yourself?
What are feelings about this interview process?

Possible Themes

- Early memories form birth to adolescence
- Preparing for adulthood
- Parents and family from the past and present
- General life questions
- Culture
- Work/retirement
- Relationship

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigation Projects

Caregiver's Form

Project Title: The Exploration and Interpretation of Mary's Life

Principle Investigator: Sean Campbell

I. The Purpose of this Research

I would like to extend an invitation to you and your mother to participate in a study of your mother's life and any stories she wishes to share about herself.

II. Procedures

I would like to interview your mother at a place that is most convenient to her and your family. I will ask your mother a variety of questions about her parents, her schooling, and her thoughts about life. In essence, my goal is to help your mother create an autobiography. Then, with her permission, I want to share her story with you and your family to gain further insight into her story. Also, I would like to use various types of memorabilia (pictures, letters, objects) during the interview that may help your mother recall specific events or people in her life. I will contact you and ask you to provide these items before the interviews.

Each interview might last a maximum of two hours, but the time can always be cut short if you or your mother wishes to do so. I would like to interview your mother twice a week; however, we can alter the amount of interviews to best you and your mother's needs. I am expecting the study to last approximately six weeks and I am looking to gather between 10 and 20 hours of total interview time.

With your mother's permission, I would like to provide you and your father with a final copy of her life story. I would like for you and your father to offer any clarification or additions to her story, to make her biography as complete as possible.

You and your mother's ideas and stories are very important to me, so I would like to use a tape recorder to make sure I do not miss any the conversation. Also, at the conclusion of each interview that I have with your mother, I will transcribe the tapes and provide a copy for your mother review at her leisure. In addition I will ask your mother if she would like me to read any section of the transcript or revisit any stories she mentioned in the previous interview.

III. Risks

I do not anticipate any risks to you or your mother from participating in this study.

IV. Benefits of this Project

You and your mother's participation in this study will provide valuable information to other families, caregivers, and professionals who study older adults. Your mother will have the opportunity to tell her story and share her life with her family. This opportunity will offer your mother the chance to reminisce about her life and organize her thoughts by doing a life review. The end result of this study will yield an autobiography for you and your family to keep.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

You and your mother's answers will be kept strictly confidential. I will be the only person who will listen to and transcribe the audiotapes. I will use pseudonyms for all names and places mentioned in her story; although I cannot guarantee confidentiality because she is the only person in my study. Any tapes not in use will be kept in a locked drawer in Dr. Stremmel's office. At the conclusion of the study, I will erase all of the tapes.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation for you or your mother, other than my sincerest gratitude.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

At any time, you and/or your mother may decline to answer any questions I ask and may withdraw from the study without any penalties.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Human Development.

IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I agree to allow my mother the opportunity to participate in this study. Also, I agree to offer any insight that I may have about my mother and her life. Finally, I agree to help with the interviews, by providing any pictures, letters, or sentimental objects that may help my mother recall events from her past.

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered and I hereby acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my permission to participate in this study.

Signature

Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact the following people at Virginia Tech:

Sean Campbell, Investigator

Phone: (540) 232-2130

Dr. Andrew Stremmel, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor

Phone: (540) 231-4671

H.T. Hurd, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Research Division

Phone: (540) 231-9359

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigation Projects

Husband's Form

Project Title: The Exploration and Interpretation of Mary's Life

Principle Investigator: Sean Campbell

I. The Purpose of this Research

I would like to extend an invitation to you and your wife to participate in a study of your wife's life and any stories she wishes to share about herself.

II. Procedures

I would like to interview your mother at a place that is most convenient to her and your family. I will ask your mother a variety of questions about her parents, her schooling, and her thoughts about life. In essence, my goal is to help your mother create an autobiography. Then, with her permission, I want to share her story with you and your family to gain further insight into her story. Also, I would like to use various types of memorabilia (pictures, letters, objects) during the interview that may help your wife recall specific events or people in her life. I will contact you and ask you to provide these items before the interviews.

Each interview might last a maximum of two hours, but the time can always be cut short if you or your mother wishes to do so. I would like to interview your wife twice a week; however, we can alter the amount of interviews to best you and your wife's needs. I am expecting the study to last approximately six weeks and I am looking to gather between 10 and 20 hours of total interview time.

With your wife's permission, I would like to provide you and your daughter with a final copy of her life story. I would like for you and your daughter to offer any clarification or additions to her story, to make her biography as complete as possible.

You and your wife's ideas and stories are very important to me, so I would like to use a tape recorder to make sure I do not miss any the conversation. Also, at the conclusion of each interview that I have with your wife, I will transcribe the tapes and provide a copy for your wife review at her leisure. In addition I will ask your wife if she would like me to read any section of the transcript or revisit any stories she mentioned in the previous interview.

III. Risks

I do not anticipate any risks to you or your wife from participating in this study.

IV. Benefits of this Project

You and your wife's participation in this study will provide valuable information to other families, caregivers, and professionals who study older adults. Your wife will have the opportunity to tell her story and share her life with her family. This opportunity will offer your wife chance to reminisce about her life and organize her thoughts by doing a life review. The end result of this study will yield an autobiography for you and your family to keep.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

You and your wife's answers will be kept strictly confidential. I will be the only person who will listen to and transcribe the audiotapes. I will use pseudonyms for all names and places mentioned in her story; although I cannot guarantee confidentiality because she is the only person in my study. Any tapes not in use will kept in a locked drawer in Dr. Stremmel's office. At the conclusion of the study, I will erase all of the tapes.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation for you or your wife, other than my sincerest gratitude.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

At any time, you and/or your wife may decline to answer any questions I ask and may withdraw from the study without any penalties.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Human Development.

IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I agree to allow my mother the opportunity to participate in this study. Also, I agree to offer any insight that I may have about my mother and her life. Finally, I agree to help with the interviews, by providing any pictures, letters, or sentimental objects that may help my mother recall events from her past.

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered and I hereby acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my permission to participate in this study.

Signature

Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact the following people at Virginia Tech:

Sean Campbell, Investigator

Phone: (540) 232-2130

Dr. Andrew Stremmel, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor

Phone: (540) 231-4671

H.T. Hurd, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Research Division

Phone: (540) 231-9359

APPENDIX D

Letter of Agreement (Consent) with Participant

This is a letter of agreement between _____ and Sean Campbell about our partnership to work on a project entitled “The Exploration and Interpretation of Mary’s Life.” If at any time, either one of us feel uncomfortable with this agreement, we may revise this agreement.

I, _____, consent to participate in this study. My privacy will protected at all costs and I will have sole choice whether or not I choose to reveal real names. I am aware of my right to privacy, and I have total freedom to withhold or withdraw from this study for any reason at any time. I have the right to invite anybody I wish during the interview process for any reason. I also understand that the success of this study depends on my involvement and my willingness to meet for the interviews. Therefore, I shall my best to fulfill my commitment to this study.

(Signature of Participant)

I, Sean Campbell, will do my best to be sensitive to all of you needs as we work together during this project. I will meet you at the places and times that are most convenient to and your family. If you feel as though you need to postpone an interview, you may do so at any time for any reason. During the interview sessions, we can break, stop early, or shape the process into whatever is comfortable for the both of us. After each interview session, I will present a copy of what you have told me, so that you may add or revise any statements. Before submitting this final project for my thesis, I will ask for your approval on the section that we will create together. My goal is to work with you and make this project a pleasurable experience and present you with a final product that you can share with your family and friends at your leisure.

(Principal Investigator)

M. SEAN CAMPBELL

Present Address

240 M. Campbell Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 232-2130

mscampbe@vt.edu

Permanent Address

P.O. Box 697
Montross, VA 22520
(804) 493-8278

Education:

Ph.D. Human Development, May 2001 (Expected)

Concentration: **Adult Development and Aging**
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA
Overall QCA: 3.9/4.0

M.S. Family and Child Development, May 1999

Concentration: **Child Development**
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA

Post-Graduate Certificate in Gerontology, May 1999

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA

B.S. Psychology, May 1996

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA
Minors: Family and Child Development; Human Nutrition and Foods
Major QCA: 3.5/4.0 Overall QCA: 3.0/4.0

Employment:

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Dept. of Family and Child Development,
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; 1999-present

Graduate Assistant to Department Head, Dept. of Family and Child Development,
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; 1998-present

Graduate Research Assistant, Dept. of Family and Child Development,
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; 1998-present

Computer and Technology Consultant, *Quality of Life Program*: United States Marine
Corps/ Virginia Tech/ USDA, Blacksburg, VA; Summer 1998.

Administrative Assistant, Virginia Tech Child Lab School, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg,
VA, Summer 1998

Graduate Assistant in Adult Day Services Center, Dept. of Family and Child
Development, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; Spring 1997-1998

Business Manager, Boy Scouts of America: Camp T. Brady Saunders, Goochland,
VA; Summer 1997

Graduate Research Assistant, Center for Gerontology, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA;
Spring 1997

Related Experience: Focus Group Moderator, Department of Engineering, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; Spring 1999-present

Advisory (Steering) Committee Member, Virginia Tech Adult Day Services Center, Blacksburg, VA; 1997-present

Tutor, Athletic Academic Advising, Virginia Tech Athletic Department, Blacksburg, VA; Spring 1999-present

Practicum: Administrative Assistant, Blacksburg Senior Center, Blacksburg Recreational Department, Blacksburg, VA; 1998

Practicum: Research Assistant, Center for Gerontology, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; Fall 1997

Undergraduate Research Assistant, Dept. of Family and Child Development and Virginia Tech Adult Day Services, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; 1996

Undergraduate Research Assistant, Dept. of Psychology, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; 1995

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Human Development I: Child Development, Dept. of Family and Child Development, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; Fall 1993-Spring 1994

Honors and Activities:

Eagle Scout with Bronze, Gold, and Silver Palms, Boy Scouts of America; awarded 1989

Kappa Omicron Nu, National Family and Consumer Sciences Honor Society; initiated 1997

Sigma Phi Omega, National Academic Honor and Professional Society in Gerontology; initiated in 1997; Treasurer 1998-present

Phi Upsilon Omicron, National Honor Society in Home Economics; initiated in 1997

National Residence Hall Honorary, National Association of College and University Residence Halls; initiated 1994

Student Affiliate of the American Psychological Association; 1994-present

Student Affiliate of the Gerontological Society of America; 1998-present

Student Affiliate of the Southern Gerontological Society; 1998-present

Student Affiliate of the Virginia Association on Aging, 1998-present

Certified Program Assistant in Adult Day Service, National Adult Day Services Association Training Program, National Council on the Aging; earned 1997

Assistant Scoutmaster, Boy Scouts of America, Troop 203, Warsaw, VA; 1991-present

Publications:

Abraham, J. L., Doolittle, P., Camp, W., Campbell, M. S., & Fox, G. E. (1998). Dynamic systems theory: Application to education. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Roberto, K., A., Richter, J., Bottenberg, D. J., & Campbell, S. (1998). Communication patterns between caregivers and their spouses with Alzheimer disease: A case study. Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 12, 202-208.

Paper Co-authored:

Abraham, J. L., Doolittle, P., Camp, W., Campbell, M. S., & Fox, G. E. (1998, July). Dynamic systems theory: Application to education. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Society for Chaos Theory in Psychology and the Life Sciences, Boston, MA.

Guest Lectures:

“Focus groups: Interpreting and analyzing data.” EDRE 6614: Qualitative Methods in Educational Research, Virginia Tech; Blacksburg, VA; Fall 98

“Dynamic systems theory: Applications to human development.” FCD 5214: Theoretical Foundations in Child Development, Virginia Tech; Blacksburg, VA; Fall 98

“Introduction to learning theories.” FCD 1004: Human Development I, Virginia Tech; Blacksburg, VA; Spring 94

“Using electronic mail.” FCD 1004: Human Development I, Virginia Tech; Blacksburg, VA; Spring 94