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Meaning in Midlife: Content or Process?

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Abstract

This study takes a qualitative approach to examine midlife experiences of meaning. The trend in previous research has been to find sources of meaning in people's lives. Reker and Wong's (1988) theory of the structure of meaning is explored in relation to previous studies. Depth of meaning is reviewed, and a model proposed of the dimensions of meaning including sources; cognitive, motivational and affective components; breadth; and depth. There were difficulties with the measurement of depth which was found to be non-linear. The model was confirmed by in-depth interviews with 38 adults in midlife, especially the dimensions of components and categories. The results support a process (dimensions) approach to meaning in life. The model was revised in the light of the data, to incorporate the dynamic movement between dimensions, and the formation of cognitive frameworks of meaning.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I. i. Meaning: The Concept

felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum
subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis auari.

Happy are they who know meanings in life, and who have
conquered the fear of meaninglessness and death.

(Virgil, Georgics I 490-492)

Since the beginning of recorded time, human beings have pursued the ever elusive answers to questions of meaning in life. The twentieth century is frequently described as an era contending with issues of meaning. The existential philosophers described the givens of existence as death, freedom, meaning and existential isolation. They observed that humankind, having lost a meaningful world and a sense of self that lives in a context of meanings, is beset by the anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness.

The first principle of existentialism is that we are nothing else but what we make of ourselves (Sartre, 1967). Objective answers to life's great questions are not there for the finding. Rather, in the certainty of meaninglessness, we must take courage and create our own meanings (Tillich, 1952). The existentialist view of reality has implications for psychology.

Existentialism has had an impact on psychotherapy, resulting in an approach or attitude towards therapy rather than a school. Existential psychotherapy focuses on concerns that are rooted in the individual's existence (May, 1969; Yalom, 1980). As human beings, we have to come to terms with Being-in-the World, in three simultaneous modes: *umwelt*, the biological world; *mitwelt*, the world of relationship with other humans; and *eigenwelt*, the mode of relationship with oneself. We live in three dimensions, the somatic, the psychic, and the spiritual; and our existence is characterised by its spirituality, freedom and responsibility (Pervin, 1960). This dynamic process of becoming underlies human development and the daily problems of living.

Victor Frankl (1963, 1967; Fabry, 1988) developed a therapeutic theory and approach he called Logotherapy.

According to logotherapy, the striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man [sic]. That is why I speak of a "will to meaning" in contrast to the pleasure principle (or as we could also term it the "will to pleasure") on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered, as well as in contrast to the "will to power" stressed by Adlerian psychology (Frankl, 1963, p. 154).

When this will to meaning is frustrated, a person's world view or *weltanschauung* is broken down, and the result is existential vacuum with typical feelings of emptiness,

boredom, valuelessness and meaninglessness.

In similar vein, Maddi (1967) uses the term "existential neurosis", a state of alienation from self and from society, with the cognitive characteristic of meaninglessness, which is the "chronic inability to believe in the truth, importance, usefulness, or interest value of any of the things one is engaged in or can imagine doing" (p. 313).

Research supports the importance of meaning in people's lives. Sharpe and Viney (1973) found that people who experienced lack of meaning and world views that were more negative than positive, lacked purpose and lacked transcendent goals. Lack of meaning leads to psychopathology (Yalom, 1980), lack of well-being (Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987; Zika & Chamberlain, 1989) depression (Craumbaugh, 1968; Dyck, 1987), and to mental and physical decline, specifically depression, anxiety and somatization (Fisk, 1980). Particular groups of people have been found to experience less meaning than people in general: psychiatric outpatients (Sheffield & Pearson, 1974), inpatients (Pearson & Sheffield, 1975), and prison inmates (Reker, 1977). Personal meaning has also been found to moderate the effects of negative stress on the health of the elderly (Butler, 1988).

These studies indicate that meaninglessness is a significant human dilemma that is present in society, and as Ruffin (1984) argued, should be of central concern to counselling professionals. We need to find out what meaning is, and how it is experienced, so that people can increase their well-being, sense of self-responsibility and enjoyment of life.

There are two quite different theoretical approaches to considering meaning. The first approach is that meaning is ultimate or cosmic (Yalom, 1980), that it exists apart from one's perception of it, and that it can be discovered. The second approach is that meaning is terrestrial (Yalom, 1980), that it is relative, and that it is internally constructed by the individual.

Frankl (1963), who held the first view, said that it can be discovered by self-transcendence; that is, by moving beyond concern for the self and focussing on other people and social and spiritual values. He held that direct focussing on pleasure and happiness tends to lead to existential vacuum, while self transcendence leads to fulfilment.

Ultimate meaning was described by Adler (1964), Frankl's teacher, as social interest, or *gemeingefühl*, and by Fromm (1949) as love of humankind. Maslow claimed that his concept of self actualisation (1964), involves transcending the self and being

devoted to a calling or cause beyond the self; that it is indeed a synonym for self-transcendence or the discovery of meaning (1966).

For Fabry (1988) ultimate meaning is an unattainable goal, and many different paths lead towards it:

"When you seek ultimate meaning, you are aware — even when you face confusion — that there is order in the universe and you are part of that order. If you are religious, you will see this order as divine. If you are a humanist, you may see it in terms of laws of nature and ethics. If you are a scientist, you will see order in the laws of physics, chemistry, astronomy, evolution. If you are an artist, you may see it in harmony. If you are ecology minded, you may see it in the balance of the ecosystem. Ultimate meaning — THE meaning of life — is inaccessible to you. It is like the horizon — you can strive toward it but you will never reach it....Ultimate meaning is a matter of faith, of assumption, of personal experience. You can live as if life has meaning and you are part of the web of life; or you can live as if life is chaotic and you are a victim of its whims." (Page 2).

The second approach to considering meaning is based on a relative view of reality and rejects the belief in an external source of meaning. Tillich (1952) perceived the loss of an ultimate concern (God) in the modern world as "the decisive event underlying the search for meaning and the despair of it" (p. 142). Instead we must rely on our own courage, which does not remove the anxiety of meaninglessness, but does help us to use our creativity to exercise choices and to take responsibility in spite of apparent meaninglessness.

In this terrestrial view (Yalom, 1980), there is no 'true' or 'ultimate' meaning of life and it is the process of discovering meaning which is important (Battista & Almond, 1973). The issue is not the meaning *of* life, but rather "What is the nature of an individual's experience of their life as meaningful?" and "What are the conditions under which individuals will experience their lives as meaningful?" This relativistic perspective is phenomenological, about the immediacy of experiences, and focuses on people's perceptions of their reality within their frame of reference.

Reker and Wong's (1988) view is that a proper view of personal meaning requires both perspectives. Meaning can be either ultimate or terrestrial; in their words holistic, "top-down", or elemental, "bottom-up". This study is also concerned with how meaning is experienced, regardless of whether the experiencer perceives it to be ultimate or terrestrial. What people believe about meaning will differ according to their belief systems; how people experience meaning is likely to be similar. We can expect that the psychological processes underlying experiences of meaningfulness are common to all people.

I. ii. Dimensions of Meaning

quisnam igitur liber? sapiens sibi qui imperiosus,
quem neque pauperies neque mors neque uincula terrent,
responsare cupidinibus, contemnere honores
fortis, et in se ipse totus teres atque rotundus,
externi ne quid ualeat per leue morari,
in quem manca ruit semper fortuna.

Who then are free? Wise persons who are in charge of their own lives, and do not fear poverty, death or imprisonment. They can control their appetites, and are not impressed with positions of power. These people are complete in themselves, polished and round like a globe. No external influence can put them off the goals they have decided to pursue and bad luck has no effect on them.

Horace, Satires, 2.7.83-88.

Maddi (1967) observed that meaning is a multi-dimensional construct. Whether people believe that meaning exists outside themselves and can be discovered, or rather that it is up to individuals to construct their own meanings, their experiences will have similar dimensions. Understanding the dimensions of meaning is therefore central to understanding the process of meaning.

We develop meanings from self-reflection and reflecting on our interpretations of life. We have experiences and ideas about the environment, and then use symbols to represent our interpretation of the environment. That internal representation becomes our internal reality. Our internal reality is the effective reality, even if as a map it would not represent the territory reliably for others. What we construct in our minds may not exist in any objective sense, but the perception does (Reker & Wong, 1988).

In the process of formulating our perceptions of meaning we think about our lives and we make valuations about what we perceive to be important. These valuations form a network (Hermans, 1988), a set of cognitions about meaning which impacts our values and goals, and brings us experiences of pleasure and fulfilment .

Maddi (1967) observed that important dimensions of meaning are its cognitive, actional and affective components. Battista and Almond (1973) put it differently: people who experience life as meaningful have a conscious articulated structure, and are committed to a concept of meaning of life which provides a framework or goal to view life from. They perceive their own lives as related to or fulfilling this concept, and experience this fulfilment as feelings of integration, relatedness or significance.

Reker and Wong (1988) described the components of meaning as threefold; cognitive, motivational and affective. In the cognitive component, people interpret their own experiences in life, and develop understanding and beliefs. This awareness may be cosmic or terrestrial, holistic or elemental (Yalom, 1980). The motivational component has a slightly different emphasis from Maddi's (1967) actional component, including values and goals as well as behaviours. People's value systems dictate which goals to choose; they pursue the chosen goals and attain them, leading to a sense of purpose, and worthwhile ends. The affective component is the feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment they get from the experiences themselves, or from the achievement of their goals. Experiences of meaning have these three components, one leading to the next, as depicted in Figure 1. This process is general to all people's experience of meanings in their lives.

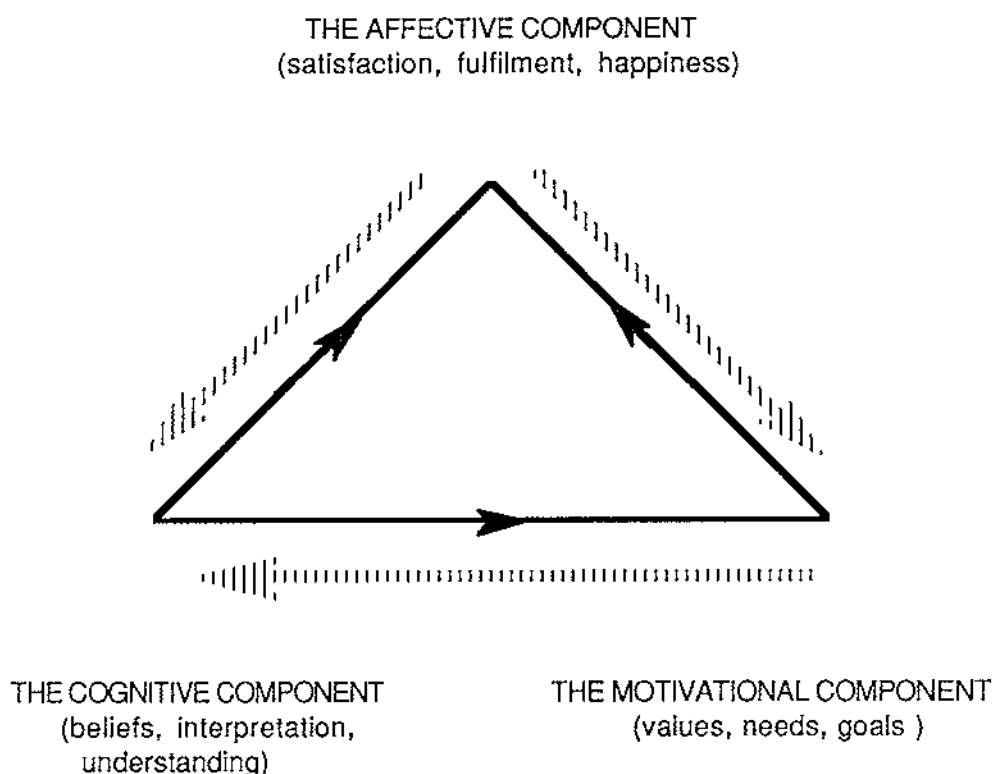


Figure 1. The structure of personal meaning. Solid arrows represent the direction of influence; dashed arrows represent feedback. (Reker & Wong, 1988. p. 222).

This structural model is an important contribution to the theoretical understanding of the psychological processes underlying meaning in life. The present study explores the implications of this approach for research. The following terminology will be used throughout:

Components of meaning are depicted in Figure 1; the cognitive, motivational and affective components of the structure of personal meaning.

Sources of meaning are the areas of a person's life in which meaning is experienced.

Categories of sources are proposed; groupings broad enough to summarise all sources into six major themes.

Breadth refers to the diversification of sources in any one person's experience of meaning.

Depth refers to the degree of self-transcendence involved in any one person's experience of meaning.

Dimensions of meaning are the aspects being studied which are components, sources and categories of sources, breadth and depth.

Each of these definitions is explored fully in its own context.

Previous studies have been of two kinds. The first approach has been to use measures of meaning to examine the importance of meaning in life in relation to another psychological construct, for example well-being. The other approach has focussed on the sources of meaning, that is the areas of life people report to be meaningful for them. Both of these approaches are deficient in terms of the structural model in Figure 1.

There have been several attempts to develop measures of meaning. These measures, however, have not been constructed with deliberate consideration of the cognitive, motivational and affective components of meaning, and therefore access these dimensions unevenly.

The Purpose in Life Test (PIL, Craumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) is "designed to evoke responses believed related to the degree to which the individual experienced purpose in life." (p. 201). This is the most commonly used measure of meaning in life, and it focuses almost exclusively on cognitions (Dyck, 1987). Ebersole, Levinson and Svensson (1987) argue that Part B and C of the PIL, which contain a sentence completion exercise and the writing of a paragraph about the respondent's aims, ambitions and goals in life should be used more often to explore wider aspects of meaning than beliefs.

The Seeking of Noetic Goals Test (SONG, Crumbaugh, 1977) which complements the PIL, measures the strength of motivation to find meaning (Reker & Cousins, 1979; Dyck, 1987).

The Life Attitude Profile (LAP, Reker & Peacock, 1981) measures both the degree of meaning experienced and the strength of motivation to find meaning. The motivation to find

meaning is quite different from the motivational component in Reker and Wong's (1988) model, which refers to the value system constructed by each individual and the pursuit of goals consistent with those values.

The Life Regard Index (LRI, Battista & Almond, 1973) has regard for the multi-dimensional nature of meaning (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988a; Debats 1990), but has been used infrequently in studies of meaning in life. It consists of two equal sub-scales, framework (Fr) and fulfilment (Fu). LRI-Fr relates to both the cognitive component, having a framework or perspective of meaning and the motivational component, having life goals. LRI-Fu assesses the degree to which the framework or life goals are being fulfilled which is leading into, but not exploring, the affective domain.

If Reker and Wong's component approach is appropriate to describe the process of experiencing meaning, we will need measures that explore equally the cognitive, motivational and affective dimensions. The current measures fail to do this adequately; they concentrate on one or two components, as the PIL does, or unevenly on all three, as is the case with the LRI.

Research on people's experiences of meaning has up until now focussed not on the components, but rather on the sources of meaning. Sources define the content of meaning; what is going on in life when significance is experienced. The cognitive, motivational and affective components of meaning identify the process of meaning; how significance affects what happens. Researching the process (components) may be more fruitful than research of the content (sources) has been. To find out whether this is so, the first step is to clarify the distinction between sources and components. The second step is to examine the sources of meaning reported previously in relevant studies, to identify those which are common to all. The third step is to test these against the three components to see if there is any confusion between the sources and the components. Finally, once any overlap has been identified, sources that remain in their own right without becoming components can be explored.

Sources of meaning are the areas of a person's life from which meaning is derived. These vary between individuals and between groups of individuals, for example between young adolescents and later life couples (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1983; Ebersole & DePaola, 1987). Cultural and ethnic background affects people's interpretations of reality and world view, and probably influences the sources of meaning in their lives. As Yalom, (1980) observed, "It is extraordinarily difficult to comprehend it free of the biases inherent in a particular culture." (p. 466). Research on meaning in life has yet to explore the effect of culture. While sources of meaning are likely to vary between cultures, all people interpret

their worlds by cognitive, motivational and affective interactions with their environments. The components approach to studying meaning is therefore more likely to generalise across cultures.

Each source of meaning a person experiences may have all three components; cognitive, motivational and affective. For example, relationship with people may be a source of meaning which is experienced in all three components; in the cognitive component as belief in the interdependence of humans, in the motivational component as altruism, and in the affective component as pleasure.

Table 1 summarises the sources found in relevant studies. McCarthy (1983) used the six most reported of De Vogler and Ebersole's (1981) categories of sources, and has therefore not been included. Since Baum (1988) and Baum and Stewart (1990) asked people to review their life experiences and the responses described life events and themes rather than sources of meaning, their findings have not been included either.

When we view the lists of sources in Table 1 with Reker and Wong's (1988) model in mind, we can see that many areas of life reported as "sources" are in effect components rather than sources. Understanding is an aspect of the cognitive component of any source. Tradition and Culture may act as cognitive or motivational components. Service and Altruism are motivational components of, for example, Relationship with People. Life Work, Enduring Values, Obtaining and Meeting Basic Needs are also motivational components. Pleasure, Satisfaction and Achievement are affective components which can be associated with any source of meaning. Material that has been regarded as a source in previous studies is therefore frequently redefined in this study as a component.

When the component perspective is used as a filter, and sources found in past research are fed through, only five sources remain as sources in their own right and do not become components. These are:

1. Relationship with people
2. Social and political
3. Religious and spiritual
4. Creativity
5. Personal Development

Table 1: A comparison of sources of meaning as reported in relevant studies.

COMPARISON OF SOURCES OF MEANING ACROSS STUDIES				
De Vogler & Ebersole (1980) COLLEGE STUDENTS	Ebersole & De Vogler (1981) ADULTS	De Vogler & Ebersole (1983) ADOLESCENTS	Ebersole & DePaola (1987) ELDERLY COUPLES	Reker & Guppy (1988) ADULTS
Relationships	Relationships	Relationships	Relationships	Personal Relationships
Service	Service	Activities	Service	Altruism
Belief	Belief		Belief	Religious Activities
Expression	Life Work	School	Life Work	Creative Activities
Growth	Growth	Growth	Growth	Personal Growth
Obtaining	Obtaining	Obtaining	Obtaining	Meeting Basic Needs
Existential/Hedonistic	Pleasure	Appearance	Pleasure	Pleasurable or Leisure Activities
Understanding	Health	Health	Health	Personal Achievement
		(Belief, Service and Pleasure not reported)		Legacy
				Enduring Values or Ideals
				Traditions and Culture
				Social and Political Causes

Note. The order of sources has been changed to facilitate comparison.

Relationship with People is consistently reported as a source of meaning in all studies. Relationships with others was the most frequently reported source of meaning for adults (De Vogler & Ebersole 1981); for people over seventy (McCarthy, 1983); and for the elderly (Baum, 1988). It was first for women, and second (after work) for men of all ages (Baum & Stewart, 1990). That this category should be most frequently reported is consistent with Frankl's (1963) view of the importance of interpersonal encounters and Yalom's (1980) discussion of the importance of altruism and contribution to the lives of others.

Religious and Spiritual and **Social and Political** belief and activities appear in some form in all studies. Belief is one category for Ebersole and his colleagues (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983; De Vogler & DePaola, 1987). Yalom (1980) used the term "dedication to a cause" and includes all causes, religious and social in this concept. Belief was the second most chosen category in three studies; by adults (De Vogler & Ebersole 1981), by people over seventy (McCarthy, 1983), and by elderly couples (De Vogler & DePaola, 1987). Reker and Guppy (1988) preferred two separate categories for Social and Political Causes and Religious Activities, and found that these two sources were low in the rankings their subjects made of their 12 categories. Religious Activities was ranked as 11th by young people, 9th by the middle aged and 8th by elderly subjects. Social and Political Causes was ranked 12th by all three groups. While in general this study has simplified lists of sources into fewer categories, it was decided to keep the distinction between religion on the one hand and social and political causes on the other.

This is partly because the relationship between meaning and religious beliefs have been explored in a number of studies. It has been found that positive life meaning relates to strong religious beliefs (Soderstrom & Wright, 1975), and that meaning acts as a moderating variable between religiosity and well-being (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988b). While Yalom (1980) gave "dedication to a cause" as one source, he included many kinds of causes, religious and secular, that contribute to self-transcendence. The other reason for distinguishing between religion and social or political activity is to maintain the distinctions between the *umwelt* and the *mitwelt*. The relationship between these categories of sources might well be of interest in future research.

Taking a components approach also affected the names given to categories in this study. The term "religion" has the connotation of a particular denomination or creed. In anticipation of subjects' describing meaningful spiritual experiences, but not being active in any church, this category was called Religious and Spiritual to include these broader views. The word "belief" focuses on the cognitive, "cause" and "activity" on the motivational.

Religious and Spiritual and **Social and Political** were therefore chosen as names for these two categories to ensure that all three components were included.

Creativity as a source of meaning has strong theoretical foundations. Frankl (1963) stated that accomplishments and creations in work, art, and scholarship are important sources of meaning. Yalom (1980) distinguished between the significance of the created object for its own sake (the creation justifies itself), and the creative act as a contribution to society. De Vogler and Ebersole (1980) first had a separate category Expression reported by only 4% and later included it in the category they called Life Work (1981, 1983). In the 1980 study, however, subjects were asked to write about only three sources of meaning, which imposed limits on the possible range of responses. Reker and Wong (1988) included Creativity in their review of sources of meaning, and Reker and Guppy (1988) found that this source was related to perceived physical well-being. In the present study, creativity remains as a category because of its strong theoretical base and because it does not overlap with any other source.

Personal Development or growth is a source of meaning common to all studies. People are ultimately self-determining. They determine not only their fate but also their own selves, for they are not only forming and shaping the course of their lives, but also their very selves (Frankl, 1967). Yalom, (1980) referred to Maslow's (1962) concept of self-actualization as a pursuit of meaning. Reker and Guppy (1988) found personal growth a potent source of meaning related to perceived psychological well-being. De Vogler and Ebersole (1980) found that 13% of college students reported growth as a source of meaning, but fewer subjects in other studies: 6% of adults (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981); 2% of young adolescents (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1983); and no later life couples (Ebersole & DePaola, 1987). It should be noted, however, that respondents were limited in the number of sources they could report. College students (De Vogler and Ebersole, 1980) were asked for three sources, as were adults (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981). Later life couples (Ebersole & DePaola, 1987) were asked to describe only one source of meaning in their lives. When respondents are able to report on the full range of their sources of meaning, different patterns of choice may well emerge. In this study, it was decided to encourage participants to talk freely and fully about the role of meaning in their lives.

Sources in previous studies, then, can be simplified into five categories, as depicted in Figure 2.

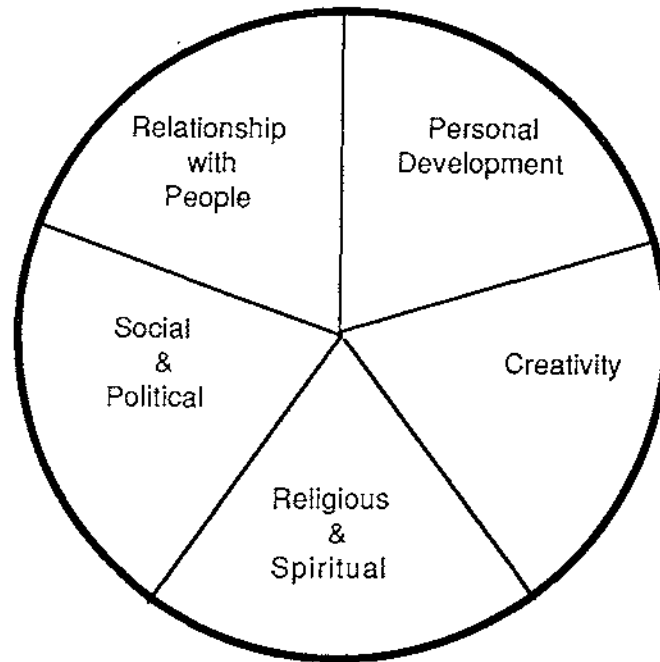


Figure 2. Five categories of sources in previous studies.

The rest of the sources listed in Table 1 have been subsumed into these five categories. This is because of the effect of applying a components perspective to the sources approach. Many sources reported in previous research, are viewed in this study as cognitive, motivational or affective components rather than sources.

I. iii. Relationship with Nature

quamquam me quidem non fructuos modo, sed etiam ipsius
terrae vis ac natura delectat.

It is not only fruitfulness that delights me, but the very
natural creative power of the earth itself.

Cicero, *De Senectute*, XV. 51. 5-7

Relationship with Nature is not given as a source of meaning in any of the studies reviewed. If it had been reported by subjects, it was not stated which category of meaning it was allocated to. The researcher, following the principle of self-reflection, was unable to categorise her relationship with nature, an important source of meaning in her life. This source could not be placed in the categories in the Ebersole studies nor the categories listed in Reker and Wong's (1988) review. In informal discussions of the model to be tested in this study, she found that the people she talked to spoke with enthusiasm about finding meaning in their relationship with the natural environment, in issues of conservation and humankind's connections with the whole universe.

Awareness of natural phenomenon has become increasingly meaningful for people in recent years, as the survival of the planet is threatened and political protest has accelerated against nuclear weapons and pollution of the environment. There is a revived interest in cosmology in modern theology. Matthew Fox (1988) provides the following definition:

By the term "cosmology" I mean three things: a scientific story about the origins of our universe; mysticism that is a psychic response to our being in the universe; and art, which translates science and mysticism into images that awaken body, soul and society. A cosmology needs all three elements to come alive: it is our joyful response (mysticism) to the awesome fact of our being in the universe (science) and our expression of that response by the art of our lives and citizenship (art). (Fox, 1988, p. 1, footnote).

This definition parallels the three components of meaning: mysticism (affective) science (cognitive) and art (motivational). The "joyful response" brings to mind what Yalom (1980) referred to as the hedonistic solution, a sense of astonishment at the miracle of life. Hedonism is the belief that pleasure is the aim, the "summum bonum" of human existence. This does not mean only sensual enjoyment, but includes social concern and cosmic awareness. As Epicurus, the founder of Epicureanism, the ancient Greek school of philosophy wrote:

It is not possible to live happily without living wisely, nobly, justly, nor to live wisely, nobly, justly, without living happily.
(Epicurus, *Doctrine* 5).

Aotearoa (New Zealand) is a small group of islands in the South Pacific, a country rich in natural resources and small in population. We are close to the hole in the ozone layer, with a nuclear free policy, many endangered species, and a predominantly agricultural economy which has its own polluting practices. Recreation for many people in this country takes place in the natural environment; many city dwellers had rural childhoods.

Yalom (1980) discussed the impact of culture on world views and therefore on their interpretations of meaning. Perhaps our world view is influenced by the Maori, the indigenous people, whose belief system about humankind in relation to nature is exemplified in this proverb:

"He kura tangata, e kore e rokohanga; he kura whenua, ka rokohanga." People die, are slain, migrate, disappear; not so the land, which ever remains" (Best, Maori, i, 40. 1924/1974).

Traditional Maori belief holds that every natural object or aggregate of objects possesses a spiritual essence, the *mauri*. This was translated by Best (1924/1974) as "life principle", and by Marsden (1975) as "life force" or "ethos". To this is due the vitality, even the very existence, of all living things. A forest, for instance, depends on the preservation of the *mauri* intact and unharmed for the fertility of the trees, the abundance of birds and rats, and the vigorous growth of the forest as a whole (Firth, 1929/1972).

The creation myths of the Maori people (Te Rangi Hiroa, 1949/1977) tell the story of the brotherhood of human beings and other living things that underlies the mutual relationship of people and other life forms. This world view is compatible with the concept of *umwelt*, being-in-the-biological world.

It is difficult to imagine that at least some participants in research in North America did not report their relationship with nature as a source of meaning. Such sources do not seem to belong for example in the categories of religion, or social and political belief, although connections between these can be imagined in individual cases. For these reasons, and especially because trial subjects saw this source as distinct from others, it was decided to create a separate category, Relationship with Nature.

With the new category Relationship with Nature added in, a model of six categories of sources was constructed. Two sources, Relationship with Nature and Religious and Spiritual relate to the meaning derived from living in the *umwelt*, the biological (possibly created) world. Relationships with People and Social and Political Belief relate to the

mitwelt, the social world of living in relation to other humans. Creativity and Personal Development are sources within the eigenwelt, the mode of relationship with oneself.

Figure 3 displays the six categories of sources of meaning, and, across all categories, the three components, Cognitive, Motivational, and Affective.

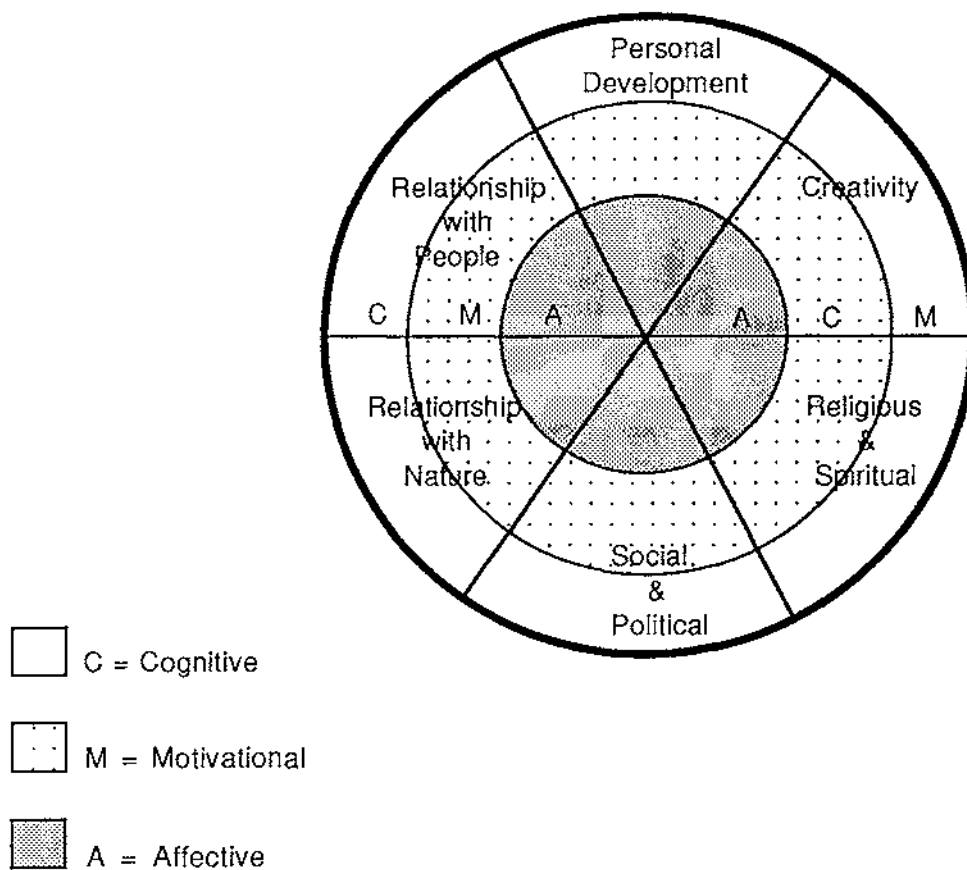


Figure 3. Two dimensions of meaning: sources and components

I. iv. Breadth and Depth of Meaning

nec uero dubitat agricola, quamuis sit senex, quaerenti cui serat respondere: "dis immortalibus, qui me non accipere modo haec a maioribus, qui me non accipere modo haec a maioribus uoluerunt, sed etiam posteris prodero."

A farmer, however elderly, when asked whom he is planting for, will reply without hesitation: "For the immortal gods, who will not only that I should receive these blessings from those who have gone before me, but also that I should pass them on to those who come after me."

Cicero, *De Senectute*, vii. 25.

Breadth

Breadth is defined as the variety of sources a person finds meaningful. The concept of breadth is indicated therefore by not only the number, but also the range of sources of meaning. To measure breadth, it is necessary to measure the variety of different sources of meaning a person reports. Reker and Wong (1988) proposed a breadth postulate: that the degree of meaning will increase in direct proportion to the diversification of the sources of meaning. It is of interest, therefore, to examine how many different categories of sources subjects report.

The proposed model illustrated in Figure 4 has six categories of sources of meaning. It is not expected that people find meaning in sources within all six or only one of these categories. Breadth then is indicated by the number of these six categories reported by each participant in the study. When De Vogler-Ebersole and Ebersole (1985) asked subjects to record how many areas of their lives they found meaningful, they found that an average of 6.29 sources per subject were reported which were allocated to an average of 4.26 of their 8 categories. The breadth score will count each category only once and range from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 6 regardless of the number of sources any one person reports. The resulting score is an indication of the diversification of sources, which dimension Reker and Wong (1988) postulate will parallel the degree of meaning experienced.

Depth

Depth of meaning has been researched by Ebersole and associates. Ebersole and Sacco (1983) described a process of validating subjective ratings of depth of meaning, De Vogler-Ebersole and Ebersole (1985) the establishment of rating criteria. Ebersole and DePaola (1989) compared depth ratings of elderly and young people. The criteria trialled in the 1985 study established a five point rating scale from "little or no depth" to "highest depth". Subjects in these studies were asked to write a one page essay (Meaning Essay Document, MED) on the one most important source of meaning in their lives, and to describe a specific

example. The resulting essays were rated for depth in five categories ranging from "little or no depth" to "highest depth" using the following criteria (De Vogler-Ebersole & Ebersole, 1985, p. 305):

1. Rate the meaning more deeply the more the central meaning is discussed with complexity and the writer conveys a sense of the individuality of the meaning.

2. Rate the meaning more deeply the more the meaning and the example are specific, believable, concrete and down to earth. Also, be sure the example is significant, not trivial.

3. Rate the meaning less deeply the more the meaning is new and therefore relatively untried and shallow. Also rate it as less deep if the meaning has been held for a while and it is evident that it has not undergone development.

4. Judge on your own whether the person has high or low meaning; do not automatically accept his (sic) judgement of his own depth of meaning.

5. If you are confused and uncertain, tend to put the essay into the middle category. Also if no example is given or if the one produced is insignificant, the rater should tend not to rate the essay any higher than the middle category.

"Deep" therefore is specified as complex, specific, tried, developing, and exemplified. Measurement relies upon the subjective judgements of the raters. Ebersole and Kobayakawa (1989) found that rating depth by this method has the disadvantage of judges' tending to rate as deeper responses congruent with their own values. Some objective criteria for depth would be preferable.

Reker and Wong (1988) suggested measuring depth as degrees of self-transcendence. There is support in the meaning in life literature for using self-transcendence in relation to depth. It has a theoretical basis; Frankl (1967) stated that direct focusing on pleasure and happiness tends to lead to existential vacuum, while self-transcendence leads to fulfilment. Research also supports this approach. Bolt (1975) found that intrinsic religious orientation (that is, a world view with transcendent meaning) correlated with relatively high scores on the PIL, and Crandall and Rasmussen (1975) found that pleasure, excitement, and comfort as defined by Rokeach's Values Survey (1973) correlated with low PIL scores.

Reker and Wong (1988 p. 226) referred to Rokeach's (1973) description of the hierarchical nature of values as a basis for proposing four levels of depth of meaning. These are, in effect, four degrees of self-transcendence:

1. Self-preoccupation with hedonistic pleasure and comfort.
2. Devotion of time and energy to the realisation of their potential, for example personal growth, creativity and self-actualisation.

3. From self-interest to service to others and commitment to a larger societal or political cause.
4. Entertaining values that transcend individuals and encompass cosmic meaning and ultimate purpose.

In this view, "deep" is defined as the degree of selflessness and abstraction. Each level is signposted by its content, which has more objectivity than the rating method in the Ebersole studies.

It was decided for the present study to trial Reker and Wong's (1988) four levels of depth of meaning, using the De Vogler-Ebersole and Ebersole (1985) criteria in determining doubtful cases. If a source were reported as having cognitive, motivational or affective components it would meet the third criterion, because it would be in action, tried and developing. If, however, the content were general and no examples available, the depth would be rated at the next lowest level where specific examples of current meaning were expressed. Reker and Wong (1988) proposed a depth postulate: that the degree of meaning will increase in direct proportion to commitment to higher levels of meaning. To test this, a reliable measure of depth is needed.

It is also necessary to calculate a score of depth for each individual. In measuring depth, De Vogler-Ebersole and Ebersole (1985) and Ebersole and DePaola (1989) asked participants to write about one important source of meaning in their lives. The score derived for each individual was therefore the score for one source only. It is likely that people experience different sources of meaning at different levels. There is a dilemma here in whether an overall score would best reflect what is happening by describing the average depth of all scores, or by averaging the deepest in each category. This dilemma was resolved by considering that a person may not repeat information at greatest depth in similar sources, but may do so in a quite different area of their lives. It was therefore decided that an individual's score would average the deepest scores within each category of sources.

Reker and Wong (1988) linked their theory of meaning to studies of self-complexity. They stated that a highly differentiated and integrated personal meaning system promotes optimal adaptation and helps people to be flexible, to think divergently, and to adapt their thinking and behaviour to cope effectively with life's ongoing stresses and challenges. Linville (1987) found that greater self-complexity moderates the adverse impact of stressful events on physical and mental health. The relationship between self-complexity and meaning has yet to be established. Reker and Wong (1988) suggested that complexity would

be influenced by both the range and quality of experiences encountered, that is, by breadth and depth of meaning. The implication is that there is a positive relationship between breadth and depth, at least for people with higher self-complexity. The relationship between breadth and depth is therefore worthy of investigation.

De Vogler-Ebersole and Ebersole (1985), in trialling their depth criteria, at the same time asked subjects how many areas of their lives they found meaningful and allocated each of the reported sources to one of their eight categories. Although they had the data both for depth and what this study calls breadth, they did not report any measurement of the relationship between the two dimensions. Presumably this was because they had measured only one source for depth. In the same report they suggested, without any reference to the data, that pursuing a number of sources might result in shallow experiences of meaning; in other words that breadth inhibits depth.

This study takes a contrary view, and proposes that breadth will correlate positively with depth, as implied in Reker and Wong's idea of personal meaning system complexity concept. Since meaning is a process with dynamic movement between components, it might well be that people who experience meaning are able to increase the variety and depth of those experiences.

The Model

The full model proposed in this study is three dimensional, as depicted in Figure 4. The surface of the figure displays the six categories of sources, Relationships with People, Relationship with Nature, Religious and Spiritual Belief, Social and Political Belief, Creativity and Personal Development. Breadth is the variety of sources, therefore the number of these six experienced. Also on the surface of the figure, cutting through the categories of sources, are three concentric circles which represent the three components of meaning, cognitive, motivational and affective. Depth is represented by the third dimension in four successive levels.

These are the dimensions of meaning that were tested in this study: Sources, components, breadth and depth. It was expected that all people would experience all these dimensions of meaning, and would be able to describe their experiences.

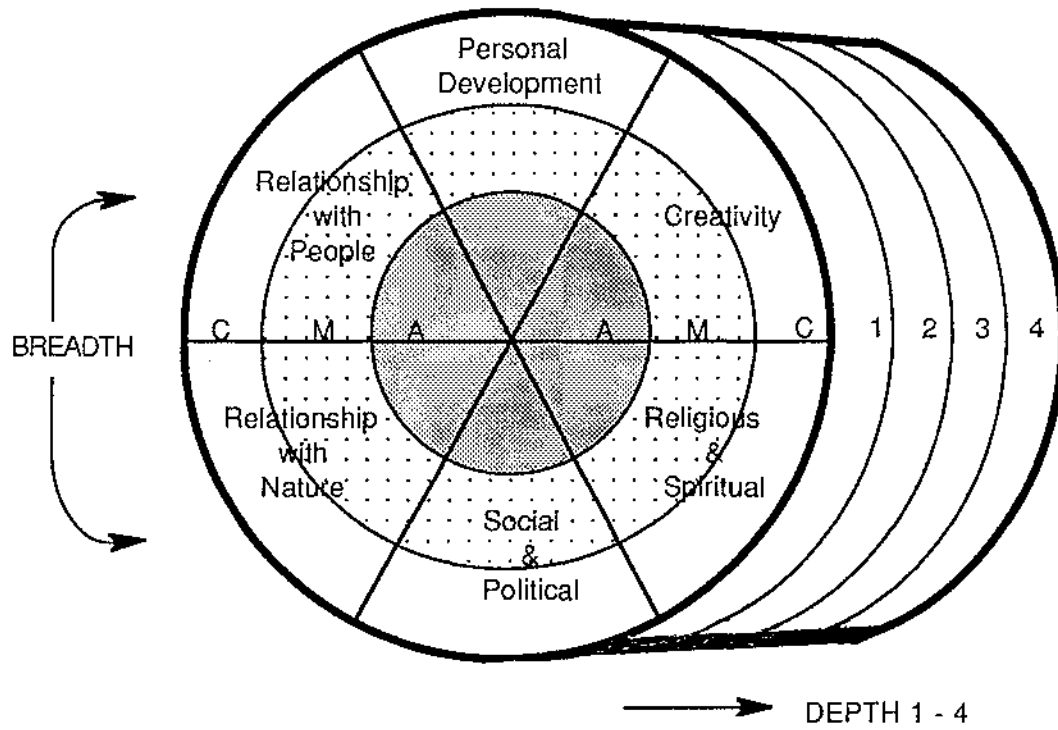


Figure 4. The Dimensions of Meaning: Categories of sources, Components, Breadth and Depth.

I. v. Midlife

Non uiribus aut uelocitate aut celeritate corporum res
magnae geruntur, sed consilio, auctoritate, sententia; quibus
non modo non orbari, sed etiam augeri senectus solet.

Great accomplishments are not achieved by strength, speed
or swiftness, but by forethought, influence and expression of
opinion. These are qualities that not do not diminish, but in
fact increase with age.

Cicero, *De Senectute*, VI, 17, 24-28.

Awareness of meaning in life has been associated with midlife since Jung (1931/1954) brought attention to the characteristics of this stage of development which he called "the midday of life". He observed that in the first half of life, people focus on preparation for living, and after that, meaning is derived through examination of the "inner" part of life, by self-reflection and re-evaluation. "The wine has fermented and begins to settle and clear" (p. 193).

Buhler (1968) also noted the movement towards interiority in midlife. She described the first half of life as spent outwardly focussed and making commitments, and the second half inwardly focussed, and building on those commitments.

Erikson's (1960) developmental perspective identified the developmental task of the forties and fifties as generativity versus stagnation. Meaning is to be found in self-transcendent activities and a sense of having contributed to the future by productivity, creativity, and establishing and guiding the next generation and society as a whole. These ideas were extended by Peck (1968) who described the tasks of generativity as valuing wisdom versus valuing physical powers; socialising versus sexualising in relationships; cathectic flexibility (the capacity for shifting emotional investments from one person to another and from one activity to another) versus cathectic impoverishment; and mental flexibility versus mental rigidity.

Research on the processes of midlife confirms these theories. Neugarten (1968) found that a conspicuous feature of middle age is a re-orientation to time. Life is viewed in terms of time-left-to-live rather than time-since-birth, and it is time to take stock of any disparities between expectations and achievements in careers (especially for men), and in using latent talents and capacities in new directions (especially for women). Typical of middle-aged people are the processes of stock-taking, heightened introspection, and the structuring and restructuring of experience - the processing of new information in the light of experience.

Levinson described life span development in terms of transitions (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee 1978; Levinson, 1986). The task of a transition is to end a period in one's life. To do this, one has to accept the losses involved and to review the past, to decide which aspects of the past to keep and which to reject, and then to look towards new hopes and goals in the future. The midlife transition begins some time between forty and forty-five, and is the time to examine inner experiences, feelings, fantasies, conflicts, values and attitudes. The task of the transition is completed when old and new concepts are integrated in the personality and in interpersonal relationships.

Levinson et al. (1978) described this as a two stage process, destructuring and restructuring. Cytrynbaum, Blum, Patrick, Stein, Wadner and Wilk (1980) analysed the process in detail and formulated three phases: destructuring, re-assessment, then reintegration and restructuring, which results in behavioural and role change.

Recent research summarised by Rosenfeld and Stark (1987) has examined the effects on aging of changing social conditions and expectations, and the creation of new "social clocks" to measure our lives by (Neugarten & Neugarten, 1987). Midlife is becoming more and more a time of greater flexibility, increasing the opportunities for evaluation and restructuring of values and goals.

Meaning can be derived from reviewing the past and reminiscing. Frankl (1963) emphasised the importance of the past in transcending the horrors of the present in the concentration camp. Meaning can also be derived from looking forward to the future, by anticipating events and looking forward to achieving life goals. Meaning in the present is related to commitment, and involvement in activities, and pursuits. Hermans (1988) asked for past, present and future significant experiences. Baum (1988) asked elderly people and Baum and Stewart (1990) people from adolescence to old age about meaningful events in their lives. Older subjects typically did not report any meaningful events after 40. However, they were encouraged to use retrospection, and to review their lives, not to report what was happening for them in the present. The resulting material from people over 40 was accounts of the events of early life seen from a later perspective. In contrast, Meier and Edwards (1974) found that degree of meaning increased with age, and Hardcastle's (1985) subjects consistently reported that life had improved up to the present and that they expected it to get better in the future. Of these studies, only one (Hardcastle, 1985) focussed on people in midlife and her subjects were asked about life themes, not meaning.

It is to be expected that the experience of living for 40+ years will increase people's skills and awareness of the issues of life (Helson and Moane, 1987). The midlife processes of

destructuring, re-evaluating and reintegrating meanings and increased interiority suggest that people of this age would be ideal subjects for studying meaning in life. Whether these processes are intrinsic to the middle years or influenced by social expectations, people at this stage in life are likely to be conscious of issues of meaning in their lives, and to be able to articulate their experiences. For these reasons, it was decided to test the model with subjects between 40 and 50.

The focus of this study is to discover how people experience meaning as it is happening, rather than their perceptions of the past or the future. It was decided therefore that participants would be asked to focus on their current experiences. This follows the example of Sharpe and Viney (1973) who asked participants to describe their pictures of reality, including their beliefs, doubts and life purpose. Since an existential construct is being explored, it is fitting to focus on the here and now.

I. vi. Research Approach

ex quo intelligitur non in natura, sed in opinione esse aegritudinem.

And so we realise that people's problems are not the result of objective reality, but of their subjective interpretations.

Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, III. xxviii. 21.

Subjectivity is inherent in meaning. "The meaning of life must be conceived in terms of the specific meaning of a personal life in a given situation." (Frankl, 1967, p. 17). Personal meaning is discovered by self-reflection. While the researcher may be the expert at the general level, the person is the expert at the particular level. Individuals have a large database of information about the self, and can tell us the content, meaning and significance of their experiences (Hermans, 1988). As Adler (1938) observed, we are not influenced by facts, but by our interpretation of facts.

As Kluckhohn and Murray (1953) put it, each person is in some ways like everyone else, in other ways like some other people, and in yet other ways, like no one else at all. According to the context, we need to find out what is true of all humans, what is true of some groups (gender, ethnic identity, age) and what is true in the unique individual experience. It is not appropriate to assume that an individual will fit the apparent general pattern of behaviour, or even the behaviour pattern of their sub-group. It is equally inappropriate to generalise from the individual experience or from that of the sub-group. It is therefore important to move back and forth between the idiographic and the nomothetic; to find out whether the general is true in the individual case, and if not, what are the implications for the group pattern or the general rule. Because meaning is an interpretation of life that results from self-reflection (Adler, 1932/1980), it is appropriate to explore individual experiences to formulate any general principles about the process. Ideographic laws have the potential to become nomothetic (Reker & Wong, 1988).

To discover whether the model of meaning that has been developed from study of the literature is valid, it must be matched to the experiences of people in their daily lives. Then it can be seen how the theory is changed by the data. Stiles (1990) called this process of going from theory to people's experience and then back to theory, reflexive validity. Lather (1986) referred to it as the principle of reflexivity in what she called construct validity. The theory that results is dynamic and subject to ongoing verification. When people's experiences have been explored in the light of the model of dimensions of meaning, the model and the dimensions theory can be adapted to better describe what actually happens in people's lives.

The approach chosen for this study was in-depth interviewing, to promote the processes of self-confrontation and self-investigation (Hermans, 1988), and to ensure that participants would find the experience personally useful. When research is participant centered, participants can gain self-understanding and become aware of their lives. Freire (1973) named this dynamic process "conscientization"; knowing reality in order to transform it.

To ensure that reliable data is gathered, and to avoid misinterpretation, it is important that the interviewer establish rapport with the participant, and maintain empathy throughout (Lather, 1988). The sharing nature of this relationship is reinforced by sharing tentative results with participants. Receiving feedback from informants has particular confirmatory power (Miles & Huberman, 1984). It establishes testimonial validity (Stiles, 1990) or face validity (Lather, 1986) and ensures that participants have a chance to add any ideas they might have left out of the interview, or thought of since.

Since people in midlife are involved in the process of destructuring and reintegrating meanings (Levinson et al., 1978; Cytrynbaum et al., 1980), being involved in research may well empower participants to access greater meaning in their lives. This empowerment is enabled by presenting the interpretation to the participants, and checking out their interpretations. If change results from being involved in the research, then the interpretation has catalytic validity (Lather, 1986; Stiles, 1990).

Previous investigations of meaning in life have asked subjects to write essays or to respond to measures to establish what sources of meaning people value. Neither sources by themselves nor measures used are adequate to explore the multi-dimensional nature of the construct. It is appropriate to take a qualitative approach to the exploration of people's experiences. Since theories are latent in people's stories (Stiles, 1990), it seemed best to approach people and ask them to tell their stories about life's meanings for them. In this way the proposed theory could be clarified.

The study aimed to test the proposed model that was constructed in the light of Reker and Wong's (1988) theoretical paper. First, each reported source of meaning was allocated into one of the six proposed categories. Each source was then examined for cognitive, affective and motivational components of meaning and these explored to see whether these dimensions supersede the sources approach of previous studies. As an approach to the concept of complexity, aspects of breadth and depth and their interrelationship were also tested. The approach of the study was both phenomenological and objective.

II. METHOD

II. Method

uolumus sane, nisi molestum est, Cato, tamquam longam aliquam uiam confeceris, quam nobis quoque ingredium sit, istus, quo peruenisti, uidere quale sit.

If it is not too much bother, Cato, since you have already been along life's long journey and we are just setting out, we would really like to know what it is like for you at the stage of life you have now reached.

Cicero, *De Senectute*, ii. 6.

Subjects

Subjects interviewed were 40 adults, 26 women and 14 men. They were recruited by word of mouth; 10 in Hamilton, 10 in New Plymouth, 15 in Palmerston North, and 5 from other parts of Aotearoa. A range of occupations were represented, including nurse, seafarer, journalist, artist, scientist, secretary, counsellor, homemaker, jeweller, union organiser, electrical technician, and educator. Interviews took place between April and June, 1990. The criteria for selection were age, willingness to self-disclose, and articulateness. Midlife was defined as aged between 40 and 50 years inclusive on 1/1/90. Willingness to self disclose was implied by agreement to be interviewed, and in the rapport building opening of the interview before questions on meaning were asked. Articulateness was also implied by participants' interest in talking about their perceptions and experiences of meaning in life. Both willingness to self-disclose and articulateness were tested by discussing the proposed interview.

Two of the subjects interviewed did not meet the criteria. One was not sufficiently articulate to respond to the questions with enough material to code. For example, when she was asked "What are the satisfactions (of family life)?" she replied " I don't know. (Laughter) I've obviously never thought about it." This interview was dropped from the data on the grounds that the subject was unable to articulate what meaning she did experience.

The other responded with minimal answers and very little self-disclosure. Although, in fact, his responses did contain all three components of meaning for each source, they were minimal and not able to be scored for depth. They did not meet the criteria of being specific, and current, but instead were superficial, had been held for a while and had not undergone recent development. For example , he answered the question "How do you experience gardening as meaningful?" by answering "It's very satisfying. You put things as seeds or little plants in the ground, then they grow and then you can eat them." This interview was dropped from the data on the grounds that the subject was unwilling to self-disclose.

Subjects were asked for their permission to be quoted. Quotes are identified in this paper by pseudonyms. Any information which might give clues to the identity of the participant has been excluded, except in one case where specific permission was given.

Interview Procedure

The interviewer was a counsellor with a person-centered approach. In these interviews she had two concerns, first for collecting useful data on peoples' experiences of meaning, and secondly, for attending to the personal concerns and comfort of the subject.

Subjects were interviewed in an informal atmosphere, with attention paid to achieving rapport. Each subject was given a paper to read explaining that they were going to be asked to talk about their experiences of meaning in their lives, and then had the opportunity to clarify what was going to happen before beginning the questions. Then the tape recorder was switched on, and the part of the interview focussed on collecting data lasted for an average of 40 minutes. The recorder was then switched off, and the interview completed with attention to the subject's satisfaction with the process. The interviewer explained the purposes of the research, and told subjects that she would contact them again later in the year.

Interview questions were open ended, but followed a structured format. Appendix A gives details of the interview procedure. The first opening question was "What do you think of as an important source of meaning in your life?", and the initial response followed by clarifying questions, eliciting specific instances of cognitive, motivational and affective aspects. Each source was followed up for depth indicators, asking initially, "Where does all this fit into (any wider picture of meaning)?" using the words the subject had already used to refer to a wider framework. Further clarifying questions were used where necessary to probe for specific information. For example a respondent who had made a general statement about meaning would be asked "How do you experience (that) as meaningful?" This procedure was repeated for each source of meaning until subjects had reported all their sources of meaning, and it was checked that they had not left out anything they thought was important.

The interviewer used a check list to note each reported source of meaning in the subject's words, and to ensure that cognitive, motivational and affective aspects were described or probed for. Finally, she checked that the subject's material was measurable according to the measure of depth of meaning.

Coding

When all the interviews were completed, tapes of the interviews were played, and the content coded according to the coding frame (Appendix B). Each source was coded into one of the six categories of the model. Each source was coded for cognitive, affective and motivational aspects. Each source of meaning was coded 1, 2, 3 or 4 on the depth of meaning scale according to the level of meaning as described in Reker and Wong's (1988) criteria:

1. Self-preoccupation with hedonistic pleasure and comfort
2. Devotion of time and energy to the realisation of their potential, for example personal growth, creativity and self-actualisation
3. From self-interest to service to others and commitment to a larger societal or political cause.
4. Entertaining values that transcend individuals and encompass cosmic meaning and ultimate purpose.

Responses were checked for internalisation and recent development, using De Vogler & Ebersole's (1985) criteria, by checking for specific instances and recent development. If such material was not given when probed for, depth was rated at the next level that did show internalisation and recent development. When more than one level was mentioned, the depth was rated at the highest/deepest given.

Reliability

Interviews were listened to and rated by a research assistant who was familiar with such procedures and who had an understanding of the model being tested. He noted each source in the subject's words, coded it into one of the six categories, checked for cognitive, motivational and affective components and rated according to the depth scale. Co-rater reliability was calculated for:

1. Number of sources
2. Coding of sources into one of the six categories of the model
3. Cognitive, Motivational and Affective components for each source
4. Depth score for each source.

In the small number of instances where there was a discrepancy, the raters conferred and agreed on a rating. Reliability data is given in Appendix C.

Individual Breadth Score

Breadth of meaning is defined as the diversification of sources of meaning. Variety of sources was identified as the number of categories in which a subject had reported at least one source of meaning. The number of sources within a category did not add variety to the range of meanings experienced by an individual, and therefore did not affect the breadth

score. Thus, breadth was calculated by adding the number of categories reported by each subject. The range of possible breadth scores resulting from this procedure was from 1 to 6.

Individual Depth Score

Each source of meaning was measured for depth and allocated its appropriate score according to the measure of depth of meaning. Then, each reported category was allocated one depth score. This was calculated by taking the deepest score awarded a source within that category. Finally, each subject was awarded a single, over all depth score. This was arrived at by calculating the mean of each individual's category depth scores. In this way scores were allocated to all sources, categories and individual subjects.

Appendix C contains the data obtained from coding participants' responses according to the proposed model of dimensions of meaning. It includes data as rated by each rater, co-rater reliability, and the final agreed ratings; Depth scores for each source, category and subject; and individual breadth scores. Appendix D gives examples of the material in participants' descriptions of their experiences of meaning. These are arranged into the six categories of sources of meaning under headings of cognitive, motivational and affective according to the predominant component.

Follow-up Questionnaire

Three to five months after the interviews, a letter and questionnaire were sent to each participant (Appendix E). The letter summarised the content of the interview. The questionnaire asked whether that was how they remembered what they talked about, and invited them to add any ideas they had had since the interview about sources or their wider picture of meaning. Participants were also asked to comment on what effect the interview had had on them and their ideas about meaning in life. When the research was completed, letters were sent to all subjects with a summary of the group findings.

III. RESULTS

III. i. Reliability

sic enim mihi perspicere uideor, ita natos esse nos, ut inter omnis esset societas quaedam, maior autem, ut quisque proxime accederet.

It seems clear to me that we were so created that there is a kind of oneness of all people which grows stronger as we become closer to each other.

Cicero, *De Amicitia*, v. 19.

Co-rater reliability was calculated for the number of sources reported by each subject, the allocation of each source into one of the six categories of the model, the coding of cognitive, motivational and affective components and the allocation of a depth score for each source. Reliability percentages are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Co-rater reliability.

DIMENSION	AGREEMENTS	DISAGREEMENTS	% RELIABILITY
Number of Sources	219	2	99.1
Categories	213	9	95.95
Components	669	0	100
Depth Scores	193	29	86.94

Agreement was very high for the identification of sources (99.1%) and their allocation into categories (95.95%). Agreement in coding sources for the presence of cognitive, motivational and affective components was unanimous (100%). Agreement was high, but with more instances of disagreement for the awarding of depth scores (86.94%). The disagreements in allocating a depth score arose because when people talked about their experiences of meaning in life, they used material at different levels of depth in succession. The movement from one level of depth to the next is not linear, and some references to deeper meaning jumped a level of the scale. Problems with measuring depth are discussed fully in the section on breadth and depth.

Discrepancies were resolved by both raters conferring, listening to the taped interview material together and negotiating agreed ratings. In the process, the problems with measuring depth were identified and discussed. In this way, the final data were established.

III. ii. Sources of Meaning

est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium diuinarum humanarumque rerum cum beneuolentia et caritate consensio, qua quidem haud scio an excepta sapientia nil quicquam melius homini sit a dis immortalibus datum. diuitias alii praeponunt, bonam alii ualitudinem, alii potentiam, alii honores, multi etiam uoluptates.

Friendship is a coming together of all things divine and human with goodwill and affection. I am inclined to think that with the exception of wisdom, nothing better has been given to humankind by the immortal gods. Some people prefer riches, some good health, others power or status, and many prefer the pleasures of the flesh.

Cicero, *De Amicitia*, vi. 20.

The number of sources reported by each participant ranged from 3 to 9 ($M = 5.84$; $SD = 1.24$). All participants in the study reported sources of meaning that fitted into the six categories of the model. To indicate the nature of participants' experiences, excerpts from the interviews are given as illustrations of each category of sources of meaning.

Relationship with People was reported as meaningful by all 38 subjects (100%). Many subjects reported relationships as several separate sources. Irene, for example, talked about a total of three sources of meaning, all within this category; her relationship with her children, her marriage relationship and her work, which is meaningful to her because of the contact with people it provides. There were those, however, whose overall cognitive framework of human relationship is conscious, and includes a number of sources:

It is like a series of concentric circles going out, all being important. The central circle would be (my partner) and my relationship with him....The next ring of relationships would be my (close family)...and then another ring outside that, other family and friends (Kaye).

Not everyone had consciously considered how relationships were meaningful to them. In all subjects' lives, however, relating to others brings meaning. Family and family relationships were commonly spoken of as central to people's lives:

My family is the centre of my life and always has been, not just my immediate family now, but my family in the past. Most things relate to my family. It's the centre and other things branch out from it. It's who you have to consider (Helen).

Relationships with children are particularly valued as meaningful, partly because of the sense of continuity involved:

It seems to me that through one's children one gets some special indication of one's own contribution or whatever; one's children, the way they think, the way they deal with their lives, the way they relate to you over the years and as time goes by as they get older is particularly meaningful. For me that's a source of meaning....I

suppose this notion of continuity is particularly important, and I think that some of the meaning I get out of my existence is the contribution I make...and the everlastingness of human existence (Mercedes).

Friendship and intimate relationships were discussed by some participants.

Relationships in the widest sense with friends are the basis of my existence. I see myself as an individual and connected strongly as if I am roped to them, to hundreds of people, people who provide me with a sense of who I am, people who provide me with support and friendship and fun (Sarah).

It may be that intimacy in midlife is experienced at greater depth than before:

It's a bit scary, because I don't want to take past patterns into it...The term "falling in love" no longer fits. This time it was actually a choice to love rather than a falling *in* love and that's quite different. There's a lot more talking, a lot more communication, a lot more listening, a lot more time just spent together looking at all of those sorts of issues, before we decide to take whatever next step we take (Richard).

Individual relationships are valued both in their own right and as part of a wider network of interpersonal connections:

We are social animals. To satisfy that we need some overall set of beliefs to incorporate other people in to our lives. It makes that into something bigger than just individual relationships with individual people. Yet those in themselves, the moments that we share with other individual human beings; that's the essence of it. To be a human being with other human beings in a human way (Mercedes).

Relating to others is central to the lives of these people, in intimate, family or wider social settings. For some, the immediate family is of paramount importance. Others perceive meaning in the wider circles of their connections to others, and interpersonal relationships as part of the whole human condition.

Creativity was the second most frequent source of meaning, mentioned by 28 subjects (74%). People talked about creativity in the context of the visual arts, literature, music and theatre, and in a wider sense, in all forms of human endeavour. Both the use of their own creativity and enjoyment of the created works of others are meaningful. Creativity can be the broad framework within which other experiences of meaning belong:

Life exists for us as people, and we are the creators. (Mere)

The creative artist is conscious of issues of meaning and images that represent and interpret reality:

When I am working out my paintings and painting paintings, I am very much aware of the meaning I am putting in to them, all of the things that I feel about life. It's not just the subject matter it's a whole life of looking, and through that life the collecting of images which are significant and then incorporating those images into designs which are the basis of the painting (Claudia).

Creativity has value in the creative act itself and also as contribution to others. It is meaningful to the person who is creating:

(It is) the creativity of producing something that you are happy with, on time and looking the way you want it to look, which is like all other forms of creativity. I do a bit of wood turning, for example. Turning out something that you are happy with, that looks good, that feels good, it's much the same sort of thing....It seems to satisfy a basic need in humans, to feel that they are contributing to the enlightenment of their fellows, if you like. I guess that's what creativity is. Producing a bowl or writing a piece that flows and reads well and stimulates thought are very much the same, I guess. It's a feeling of achieving something that's original as well, that you are not just aping someone else's work, you have actually come up with something new in the whole deal. That's a very meaningful thing (Daniel).

Meaning can also be gained from the appreciation of the creative work of others:

I enjoy experiencing someone else's creativity; I just listen and admire....Because life is constantly changing, people are constantly creating things; not creating them from an absolute non-existent state, but creating them in the sense that they are drawing little bits from all around and from their own life's experience. They are shaping them and re-expressing them. I find it really exciting that people are able to do that. I'd like to be able to do that better and more often and in a greater variety of ways. I enjoy music and literature because that's what other people have done and I can share in that; I don't have to be the creator myself (April).

These reported experiences echo Frankl's (1965) emphasis on creativity as a source of self-transcendence and meaning. People find meaning in being producers of created things themselves and also appreciate the created works of writers, musicians, dramatists, painters, sculptors, architects, builders and craftspersons. A number of people commented that they intend to become more involved in creativity in the future both as spectators and creators themselves. These people are enjoying the midlife stage of generativity as described by Erikson (1963).

Personal Development was described by 27 subjects (71.05%) as a source of meaning. Themes of self-responsibility and independence were common in the stories of those who talked about personal development. A sense of life's brevity adds some urgency to clarifying personal goals and values:

You never quite know when this life is going to end. You've got this one shot at it, so it is important do what is personally the most desirable thing to do, taking into account these other values that I have....One goal is independence, and being able to be

interdependent if I choose to be, taking responsibility for the things I decide to do. My decisions are internally based rather than being influenced by external sources (Patricia).

Once more, how meaning is experienced in a source ranges from the personal to the universal. Self-development is a life long, ongoing process:

I think that individual people have to be self-nurturing and have to examine what they are up to and where they are up to in their own way, within their own frame of reference. They have to be complete in themselves to be able to, so its a (process of) checking and developing (Mercedes).

Personal growth can be perceived as an aspect of the world's progress, an integral part of universal development:

Everything is in movement and nothing is static. I firmly believe that....It stands to reason that if materially and technically the world moves on, then individuals move on with it. There is more to development than material and technical development; there is personal development, too (Rebecca).

The importance of personal growth and development to the people interviewed is consistent with the theory that midlife is a time of increased interiority (Neugarten, 1968). The meaningfulness of this category may be for the individuals themselves, as a means to interpersonal and social ends, or as an intrinsic part of the development of the universe.

Relationship with Nature, the new category proposed by the model tested in this study, was reported by half of the subjects. Meaning was derived from connectedness to the cosmic and planetary level, and also from the personal and pleasurable level. Many people are concerned for the survival of the planet and share in the responsibility for the role that humans as a species have played in putting it at risk:

Humans are only part of the universe. Though we are the dominant being in the physical world, what humans haven't yet learned is how to interact with the rest of the world, with our environment. Humans are behaving perfectly naturally...we are exploiting our environment, our niche, to the maximum — every other animal does that, every plant does that. Its just that we do it more successfully than others. But in the process we are destroying so much of this star ship earth (Jack).

At the personal level, nature is a source of refreshment for many people:

The appreciation of nature is important to me. Learning the trees, paddling in the mud, watching the river flowing over the stones — its soothing. And the green of the bush I find so soothing (Andrea).

That oneness, me and the universe; it feels like an evening of my spirit. It is almost a spiritual experience in that my mind is relaxing but my mind told me to get out there, my body took me there, and my spirit is feeding while I am there, so it feels like a very total experience (April).

People draw strength and refreshment from connectedness with other living species, and are concerned about environmental issues. It is often in the context of the physical world that meaning surfaces in consciousness:

I find (meaning in life) possibly a bit more confusing than some people do because I take trips to sea and into the country and look up into the open heavens; and if it is ever going to, the question really burns itself into your brain then. I can remember as a kid, I used to sleep outside and look up at the stars, and wonder whether there was a God up there, was there anyone else up there, and if so what were they doing. I'd try to figure out the big question (Daniel).

When I look up at the visible universe at night, I feel an incredible peace in my insignificance (Charles).

The prediction that middle-aged people in Aotearoa would express their connection to the natural environment as a source of meaning was found to be true. Experiences of meaning occur to people at personal and cosmic levels, and are part of their belief systems, as well as causing both pleasure and concern.

Religious and Spiritual beliefs and activities were described as sources of meaning by 27 subjects (44.74%), some of whom belonged to particular churches, others whose spirituality was wider than within any orthodox religion. People talked about their religious and spiritual beliefs, values and goals and feelings in this area of their lives. Participants who belonged to particular Christian denominations tended to describe a general Christian commitment rather than any particular dogma and practices:

Recently, I have had a deeper and more significant understanding of faith and how it leads me through my personal life....It is a source of nourishment and a source of guidance, not the doctrine so much as some of the religious passages I have read.... (Now that I am a Christian), life is more simple for me (Brian).

Some talk about religious activity without reference to spirituality or a relationship with God. For them it is the value system that has meaning:

I came from a religion oriented family, we still practise our faith, its one of the criteria of living in our family is that you practise the faith....Christian attitudes are more important than religion (Mark).

In contrast, other people spoke of how they reject aspects of organised religion, but value their spiritual beliefs:

I have found Christianity, the church, is lacking in what is needed for me as a woman, spiritually....I find it oppressive, masculine, and out of date (Hannah).

My beliefs began in religion, in church when I was a kid. I always had this vision of myself as a churchgoer, and possibly as a leader in the church, but I decided that the church was too confining. So, I left the church; but my faith and my beliefs are my religion at the moment; my belief in the soul, which gives the basic meaning to my life (Jeannette).

Although the dogma of Christianity is no longer accepted, the acceptance of the existence of an ultimate power and a final accountability may still remain:

Well, I am sure there is something else beyond this particular physical life we are in. I don't think there is Jesus and God and the devil and the angels standing on clouds playing their harps, but I certainly think that there is another level of existence, otherwise I can't see the point of being here. You have to...prove you can use what skills you have got, now, so perhaps you can do better the next time wherever you are. But if you don't use them, you lose them. It's a gift; whatever is your talent is a gift....You have got to use it, otherwise it is taken away from you by whoever, that great big force field (Martha).

Organised religion has decreased in meaningfulness in the lives of the majority of the people who were interviewed. Those who were members of particular churches did one of two things. They either talked about the value system of that church, and not their relationship with God, or they identified as Christian rather than as a member of a denomination. Many were no longer active members of a church, but value their spirituality. Spiritual awareness and the ethics of religious teaching apparently survive longer than religious observances. The extending of the name to Religious and Spiritual was justified by the range of responses in this category.

Social and Political Belief was discussed by 11 (28.95%) subjects. While it was the category explored by fewer participants than any other category, it was an important source of meaning for some people. Once more, people's descriptions of the awareness of meaning in this area ranged from the inter-personal and particular to the international and global. Small scale change is the focus for some:

I have very firm convictions about... the necessity for growth....I take an overview of the world; there are lots of things presently wrong with it that people have caused, and if people change, then whole systems and whole worlds change. I guess its a global view. I guess that "think globally and work locally" is the way I see the overall pattern of things (Richard).

Others are involved in broader systems change, and find social and political action satisfying:

The satisfactions fluctuate according to how I think it is going. When something happens that looks as though its good and will add to the big cause, that's good. When you achieve something that you saw as one of the goals, a new awareness in the community about something, that's good. Some things move a lot more slowly and the results are not clear straight away. That doesn't mean that you give up. The satisfaction comes from examining what it is you think you are doing and why you are doing it and coming up with arguments or confirming beliefs or thoughts or whatever which still make it worth while to go on doing it. You still maintain the image or vision of what it is that you think will be a good outcome. The fact that it is not yet a reality is OK, because you keep the image, the vision (Mercedes).

For others politics was a source of meaning in the past, but not currently:

I am increasingly less interested in politics. I was politicised in 1981 by the Springbok tour, and I was intensely political for 4 or 5 years. Now I am not political any more, and I have a great depth of cynicism about politics and politicians. I no longer get any pleasure out of talking politics. It is too disheartening (Emily).

Deriving satisfaction from social and political activity requires a long-term view. One may not see the results of one's efforts, at least for some time. The satisfaction is therefore to be gained from the endeavour rather than from the achievement of goals. The individual's contribution, however, although relatively small, is a vital part of social change. Self-transcendence is necessary:

I think it is only by people making mutual sacrifices that will help to overcome the social problems, the racial tensions, the political differences between people. If one dies before the process is finished, we accept that. We know that individually we can achieve little. We must join with others (Stephen).

Perhaps it is because of the lack of immediate rewards or recognition that fewer people find meaning in social and political belief than in other sources of meaning. It is possible that if the affective component of a source of meaning is not experienced, the source as a whole loses viability.

All the sources of meaning described in the interviews were coded into one of these six categories. The frequency of sources reported in each category is summarised in Table 3. Relationship with People was indicated as a source of meaning by every subject. Social and Political Belief, while being the least frequent category, was reported as a source of meaning for more than a quarter of the participants.

Table 3: Frequency of category as reported by subjects

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	%
Relationship with People	38	100.00
Creativity	28	74.00
Personal Development	27	71.05
Relationship with Nature	20	52.63
Religious & Spiritual	17	44.74
Social & Political	11	28.95

Note. Total N = 38.

Other sources identified in previous research belonged as components in one of the six categories as predicted. The affective component of most sources included some satisfactions and pleasures. Service to others and altruism were frequently spoken of as motivational aspects of relating to other people. Meaningful work located comfortably as the motivational component of one of the six categories, according to the ideas a person had about what aspects of life were most meaningful for them.

I'm one of those fortunate people who is paid to do my hobby...What I gain out of the work I do, is the passing on of knowledge that I have found interesting....In the twinkling of an eye that we are on this earth, I feel as though I have contributed something....Life is to do with sharing, and, as in friendship, there is pleasure in sharing. In the job I have, I can participate in the sharing process, through teaching and through publishing research (Jack).

Some subjects had considered meaning in life and were aware of how it operated in their lives. When they talked about meaning, they shared their concepts of the process of the experience rather than specific areas of their lives. Meaning affects goals and values, as the model of the dimensions of meaning demonstrates. Sources of meaning are illustrations of that process, and these subjects described their experiences in that way:

I gain meaning from having a sense of purpose, having something to strive for, having a goal to strive for. Work as in my paid employment is one source of that purpose, it gives me goals and tasks and things that I can master. Something like study would be the same sort of thing. It is necessary to have something to put my intellectual energies and my physical energies and my concentration toward....It gives me a chance to contribute something to other people (Kaye).

This account suggests that dimensions of meaning override sources in some people's perceptual frameworks; that they are aware of how meaning operates in their lives as well as being aware of what kind of experience is meaningful.

It appears that people tend to report certain combinations of categories of meaning. Patterns can be detected between the categories that people report as set out in Table 4.

Table 4. Patterns of reporting among categories: Percentage of subjects reporting all other categories (columns) given that they have reported categories (rows).

Categories	N	People	Nature	Soc/Pol	Religion	Creat.	Pers. D.
People	38	*	53	29	45	74	71
Nature	20	100	*	35	35	85	60
Social & Political	11	100	64	*	36	90	73
Religious & Spiritual	17	100	41	41	*	65	88
Creativity	28	100	61	36	39	*	64
Personal Development	27	100	44	30	56	69	*

Note. N = number of subjects reporting any source within this category (Total N = 38).

This table shows the proportion of people who reported meaning in any one category also reporting meaning in each of the other categories. Some of these patterns are intriguing. It seems that Religious and Spiritual matters interest different people from those who are involved in Nature, Creativity and Social and Political ideas and activities. Not many people derived meaning from both Umwelt categories. People reporting Social and Political interests were highly likely to also report Creativity, and these are not two categories with obvious similarities. When Personal Development is said to be meaningful, Creativity is likely to be meaningful too, both categories of the *eigenwelt*. Being involved in Personal Development probably indicates low involvement in Social and Political ideas and activities and in Nature. These proportions raise interesting questions about from where people derive experiences of meaning, and possible connections between the role of meaning in different activities and values about life.

In summary, sources of meaning were all categorised into one of the six categories of the model of dimensions of meaning. Five categories contained all the sources reported in previous studies: some belonged appropriately as components of another source of meaning. The addition of a sixth category, Relationship with Nature, was justified. One source, Relationship with People was reported by all subjects. All categories were reported by more than a quarter of the people interviewed. At times, however, people talked about the underlying process of how they experienced meaning more than the content of what provides those experiences.

III. iii. Components of Meaning

quibus enim nihil est in ipsis opis ad bene beateque uiuendum, eis omnis aetas grauis est; qui autem omnia bona a se ipsi petunt, eis nihil potest malum uideri quod naturae necessitas afferat.

For those who do not have within themselves the resources for well-being and happiness, all stages of life are burdensome; in contrast, for those who look within themselves for answers, nothing that the inevitability of life brings seems evil.

Cicero, *De Senectute*, ii. 4..

All but one of the subjects reported cognitive, affective and motivational components for each reported source of meaning. The one subject who did not, had no data for the affective component of one source in the Personal Development category, nor for the affective nor motivational components of another source in the Religious and Spiritual Belief category. This was reported to her in the feedback letter. Her response to that letter addressed one area, the motivational component of the source Church, but still without any specific material:

I believe I would (or should) have said that my goals and values are very much affected by church. Without church I don't believe I would have high and important values and morals which I believe I have (Sheila).

All other subjects did supply specific data for cognitive, motivational and affective components of each source of meaning. This is consistent with Battista & Almond's (1973) finding that the Framework and Fulfilment sub-scales of the Life Regard Index correlated highly, suggesting that either one cannot maintain a framework that is not being fulfilled, or, that if one has no framework, one has no meaning.

The movement from one component to another can be very rapid, and in either direction. This example shows movement from cognitive (C) to motivational (M) and then from motivational to affective (A) components:

I've chosen an occupation (C), nursing, where I can exercise interacting with people (M) in a way that gives me satisfaction (A), and as well I can apply skills that I learn along the way (C) to those interactions and at the same time get paid for it (M) (April).

Reker and Wong's (1988) model of the structure of meaning depicted in Figure 1 on page 5 shows by arrows the movement from cognitive to motivational, cognitive to affective, and motivational to affective components. Feedback arrows in that figure show the reverse

direction (affective to cognitive, affective to motivational and motivational to cognitive). This is demonstrated in the above example by the reverse movement from satisfaction to the next idea of applying skills.

What is not suggested by Reker and Wong (1988) is the movement between sources. One source of meaning in its motivational component frequently leads to goals being set in another arena, which then becomes another source. It is as though there is a spiral effect from one experience of meaning to another. For example, when Daniel was explaining the importance of relationships with other people, he illustrated the motivational component with information about his involvement with theatre:

I can't think of anything much more satisfying than actually working as a team on a project, for example. I do a bit of theatre, and I find theatre is a great way of pulling the group of people together who have basically very little in common, giving them a common goal, and then making them work together to achieve that goal, and at the same time enrich all the people that are involved (Daniel).

He then went on to describe his enjoyment of theatre as a source of meaning in its own right. This process was identified in rating discrepancies. Rater 1 coded theatre as a separate source of meaning (Creativity), and Rater 2 as a motivational component of Relationship with People.

In the next example, the same movement is described from the other direction, the impact of beliefs of one source on the values of another:

I value more than any other human experience contact with other humans. The experiences in my life that have the most meaningful ramifications are encounters with other humans, and how I relate those encounters to my value system is influenced a lot by my Christian convictions (Stephen).

This spiralling effect from one experience of meaning into another was a frequent pattern for subjects with a conscious personal meaning framework.

III. iv. Frameworks of Meaning

nam tibi de summa caeli ratione deumque
 disserere incipiam et rerum primordia pandam,
 unde omnis natura creet res auctet alatque,
 quoue eadem rursus natura perempta resoluat.

For I shall begin to discuss with you my theory about the heights of the heavens and the gods. I will explain atomic theory to you. Nature creates all things from atoms as she increases and nourishes all things, and eventually she releases all things back into atoms again.

Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. I. 54-57.

People interviewed described both ultimate and terrestrial views of meaning. Most of their descriptions of how they saw meaning were clearly either one or the other, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

I think it has all been planned for you. I think it is just up to the individual to take notice of what is going on and listen to their inner self; to know where to go....There is always a plan, but whether or not that person takes that plan is up to them. It depends on what pitfalls have come into their life, whether they are strong enough to see through things and look deeper. But I think there is a plan. There has always been a purpose. If things happen you have got to find out why they happen....I think everything has got a meaning, especially if bad things happen....I don't know where the plan comes from (Susan).

The meaning of life to me is a total mystery. I think it's a farce, we are just an accident of nature. I don't believe in God or heaven or hell or anything else. I would like to have a belief in some sort of God, in an after-life. It would be a great comfort to me. But I can't believe it, because no one has shown me that it is true. So I think that life is basically a dreadful place, but as long as you are here, you might as well enjoy it and you might as well be as fulfilled as you can, doing it. I try not to lose any sleep over the fact that when I snuff it, that's it. I don't like the thought of that at all, but it's something that I can live with because I can't find a better answer. So as long as I'm here, I enjoy life. I make my life as happy and as meaningful as I want it to be (Maxine).

Each interview began with a question asking participants to describe a source of meaning in their lives, one area of life which they experienced as meaningful. In this way, sources were elicited, and explored one by one. They were also asked to describe any wider picture or framework of meaning they had in their minds. The intention of this question was to explore the dimension of depth. The answers did yield deeper material. They also revealed that more than a third of the people interviewed had conscious frameworks of meaning in life, holistic world views, into which their experiences of meaning were integrated.

Both ultimate and terrestrial meaning systems were described in these frameworks. Religious and spiritually based views of meaning, and connectedness with the physical universe are frameworks arising from the *umwelt*, the relationship with the biological (or created) world. Few participants made the connection between these two categories this explicitly:

We are all part of, the whole creation is part of God. He is us and We are in Him. The wonderful thing about the world is that it is so perfect, and so beautiful but so mind-bogglingly insignificant when you look at all of the universe... all of which are part of this being, of God. That's why I have a very strong belief that the world will continue and evolve and continue to be because it is part of this....(I therefore) enjoy being here, try and be aware of it, the way it smells, tastes, feels. I enjoy being part of it; I plant it and nurture it (Jonathan).

Each of the sources in Jonathan's exploration of the sources of meaning were integrated into this framework. Some participants explained their view of meaning in a context of creativity or personal development; the *eigenwelt*:

I often think that the meaning of life is to be creative. You can be creative in lots of ways and dedicate the activity to either yourself, or a God, or society, or some other end. I think that having kids is quite a creative thing to do and that's one of the things that I really enjoyed (Sarah).

For a long time, I guess, I was one of those people who was searching for this meaning of life and what is it, and is there a formula, and all those sorts of things. I have come to the conclusion that there isn't, and the largest part of the meaning in my life is the acknowledgement and acceptance of myself as I am. That goes deeper inside to internal things; a spiritual aspect if you like (Richard).

The *mitwelt*, being in relation to other humans, is the framework of meaning most commonly described by participants in this study. The relative frequency of reported sources would lead us to expect that this would be so. Frameworks of this kind range from the interpersonal to the social and cosmic. For some, the focus is narrow, and the people they perceive to be their responsibility are the people who matter:

I suppose as far as I'm concerned that the family is what we are for. We are here to propagate the species....That's my biggest responsibility. Having taken on a family, I must see it through to its conclusion and its ultimate goal, its destiny.... Everything else revolves around it. Whatever else I do is governed by that. I mean, I can't just go and climb Mount Everest. It is as though that is my Everest, bringing the family through unscathed (Michael).

More commonly, the framework of meaning is on a wide social scale, and meaning is found in the sense of contribution:

The changes we would like to see being made, we can contribute to making. Working with other people help changes happen as well. Being in there, being part of the human condition, and not separating oneself off and leading a solitary and self seeking existence. That's where one acknowledges one's belongingness, and that's both positive and negative. So pitching in and saying that I'm a human being and what affects other people also affects me. There's no way in which one can stand back and see damage being done to one person without it affecting all of us. We have common cause. It's the old "Injury to one is injury to all" (Mercedes).

The stronger the framework, the more it overrides separate sources. Some subjects found it difficult to deal with sources separately, since each led inevitably to the same wide framework:

"They (different sources) are not separate you know, I can't see them as separate" (Jeannette).

"They (different sources) are all important, they are all the one picture, they are all equal" (Mere).

More than a third of the people interviewed disclosed frameworks of meaning. Although all six categories were used as a basis by some people, relationships with people was the most common theme of frameworks, as it was the most common category of sources. People's world views as uncovered by talking about their over all picture of meaning in life ranged from the self and family centered to the global and cosmic.

Integrated frameworks of meaning such as these have implications for the dimensions model proposed in this study. It may not be sufficient to examine the dimensions of cognitive, motivational and affective components, categories of sources, breadth and depth, without looking at how these are integrated into conceptual frameworks. Breadth and depth are likely to contribute to self-complexity in such frameworks rather than in relation to each other. The implications for the model are explored further in the section on the model in IV ii.

III. v. Breadth and Depth

adhuc sublimia cures:
 quae mare compescat causae, quid temperet annum,
 stellae sponte sua iussaene uagentur et errent,
 quid premat obscurum lunae, quid proferat orbem,
 quid uelit et possit rerum concordia discors.

You still care about lofty themes: what laws rule the sea, what controls the temperature during the year, whether the stars go off course and wander around freely or in accordance with some law; what drives the moon into darkness, and brings it back into sight; what nature's conflict in harmony intends and what it brings about.

Horace, Epistles, I. 12. 15-19.

Subjects reported a mean of 5.84 sources each ($SD = 1.24$). These were allocated into a mean of 3.68 ($SD = 1.14$) of the six categories. This allocation provided the breadth scores. Breadth scores therefore ranged from 1 to 6 ($M = 3.68$; $SD = 1.14$). Depth scores at each level are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Frequency of scores at each depth level

DEPTH LEVEL	FREQUENCY
1	7
2	55
3	89
4	71

Depth scores for all reported sources ranged from 1 to 4. ($M = 3.00$; $SD = .49$). Of the 223 sources scored, only 7 scored 1. While material at level 1 was often a part of people's descriptions, particularly of affective components, it was usually alongside material at a deeper level, and the score was allocated at the deepest level achieved within each source.

From the scores generated for all the sources, an individual depth score was calculated. When an individual's depth score is derived from the mean of all depth scores ($M = 3.01$; $SD = .49$), depth correlates positively with breadth ($r = .42$; $p < .01$; $df = 36$). The advantage of this approach is that all the data contributes to the analysis, and it reflects the general range of depth responses.

However, when the depth score for each subject is calculated by averaging the deepest score within each reported category ($M = 3.18$; $SD = .53$), the relationship weakens ($r = .29$; $p > .05$) and is not significant. The second method of calculation is more conservative because deeper scores are emphasised. It has the advantage of removing the effect of multiple sources within a category. For example some subjects gave a range of people they related to as separate sources in contrast to those who described all relationships as the one source. This method also continues the practice that was established in allocating a depth score to each source, in that the deeper material is scored.

It can be seen that there is a low to moderate relationship between depth and breadth. This is a tentative conclusion, since there are several problems inherent in the depth scale.

First, depth is implied by the content of the source of the meaning, as shown in Table 6. The source in which a person experiences meaning affects the depth of that experience. On average, the greater depth was reported for Nature (3.75) and Religion (3.65), and Social and Political Belief (3.64), areas which imply at least a world-wide scope.

Table 6. Depth scores by category of source of meaning

CATEGORY	NUMBER	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	RANGE
Relationship with People	94	3.34	.6	1 - 4
Relationship with Nature	22	3.75	.96	1 - 4
Social & Political	12	3.64	.51	3 - 4
Religious & Spiritual	18	3.65	.86	2 - 4
Creativity	33	2.99	.93	1 - 4
Personal Development	43	2.52	.72	1 - 4

Relationship with People, (3.34.) is likely to be described at level three. Creativity (2.99) is sometimes level 2 (self expression) and more frequently, level three (contribution to others). Personal Development (2.52) is essentially level 2, unless explicitly related to social and cosmic implications. Yet the increased interiority experienced in mid life (Neugarten, 1968) has connotations of increased depth, albeit within the self. The depth dimension of the model has an uneven base.

The second problem with the scale is that depth is able to move from the personal and self-oriented to the cosmic without passing through the interpersonal and social, moving therefore from 2 to 4 without passing through 3. In this example, music is described as personally satisfying in a range of ways at level 2. Then music is described as a means of experiencing meaning at a cosmic level, level 4. Level 3, "service to others and commitment to a larger societal or political cause" is not mentioned.

Music can be a meditative source, a joyful experience too. Or, it can be a physically and emotionally arousing experience, depending on the kind of music, or the situation, whether it has memories attached to it....It puts me in touch with my own inner self. Everybody has more ways to express themselves than by talking, and we have this brain to use and emotions to express, and (the arts) provide us with the means for this to happen....It can put us back into being in touch with the whole cosmos, with the interaction of people, with the interaction of ourselves and this land which we have such intimate contact with. I think that art and music do that (Patricia).

It seems that for this person, the depth of meaning experienced in music is personal and transcendent, but does not have social implications. This raises the question of whether the depth scale is truly ordinal, or whether it is at best nominal.

The third problem with the depth scale is that the levels seemed not to be all the same size. Level one is a narrow zone in that it refers to pleasure and nothing else. Only 7 of the 222 sources were allocated a 1. It would seem that pleasurable experiences are rarely merely pleasurable. Pleasure is an affective component of any source of meaning, and it is rare for cognitions and motivated experiences not to reach deeper material. In effect, then, only three levels of the scale are useful. Level 3, in contrast, is wide. Material at a personal level reaches Level 3 easily, once personal growth or creativity include reference to service or contribution to others:

I get a lot of pleasure out of pottery. I like creating things, and also I make pots for other people as well, and that gives me a great deal of pleasure to work on something and know its going to a good home. It is not just going to sit on a shelf being forgotten. It's like a part of me going somewhere else which is important. I have a sense of pleasure and achievement that someone else is happy to have something I have produced in their home (Laura).

At the other end of the Level 3 continuum:

Interdependence is important. The contributions that people make, and the level of consciousness that people have, are working towards a level of consciousness in the population that's helpful for all people (Mercedes).

In between these belong a wide range of experiences and beliefs about meaning, from interpersonal intimacy and values about family life, to social concern and world peace.

There were problems with the measuring of depth. First, degrees of self-transcendence are allied to the content of the six categories of sources. Secondly, it is possible to move from the personal to the cosmic without passing through the social, thereby skipping level 3. Thirdly, the four levels are steps of differing sizes. Therefore the low to moderate relationship of breadth with depth is a tentative finding. Measuring the depth of each source as it is described may not be appropriate. Perhaps instead, depth is associated with a person's whole framework of meaning.

III. vi. Follow-up Questionnaire

orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano.
 fortem posce animum mortis terrore carentem,
 qui spatium uitae extremum inter munera ponat
 naturae, qui ferre queat quoscumque labores,
 nesciat irasci.

What you should pray for is a healthy mind in a healthy body. Ask for a strong spirit which is free from the fear of death, which puts a long life span among nature's gifts, and which is able to bear any kind of hardship without anger.

Juvenal, III. X. 356-360.

A high proportion of participants, 35 of the 38 subjects (92.1%) replied to the follow-up questionnaire. All agreed that the summary of the interview was accurate. 17 (49%) talked of further ideas that had occurred to them since the interview. Of these, only 5 added to the interview material a new source which would belong in another category, and therefore add one point to their Breadth scores. Depth scores were not affected. In general, additional data gave more details within the same categories, and did not alter the breadth or depth scores.

Of the 35 replies, 27 (77%) talked about the positive impact the interview had on them and their ongoing consideration of the idea of meaning. 3 replied that the interview had had little or no effect, and 5 left the response space blank. These responses are evidence of catalytic validity. Two subjects used the word "catalyst" in describing the effect of the interview on their thinking about meaning:

It came at a time when I was already thinking about the sources of meaning in my life, so the interview was a catalyst to pull these ideas into a pattern and provided the opportunity to verbalise these thoughts (Kaye).

It was a good catalyst in helping me to think through and clarify some of my beliefs and the sources of meaning in my life (Judith).

For some subjects, meaning is a central concept in their lives and the interview was focussing on a familiar and ongoing theme.

There does seem to be a cycle or spiral pattern in the re-occurring of 'thinking about meaning in life'. Both major and trivial events trigger each new layer of thought. Each time understanding deepens (Claudia).

Receiving this information from the participants in the study was useful. The accuracy of the summaries of sources was confirmed. All those who replied agreed that the summary was an accurate account of what they had talked about. Of particular interest was the discovery that for such a high proportion of these people, the interview had not only been a positive experience, but had increased their awareness of meaning in life.

IV. DISCUSSION

IV. i Discussion

mihi quidem ita iucunda huius libri confectio fuit, ut non modo omnis absterserit senectutis molestias, sed effecerit mollem etiam et iucundam senectutem. numquam igitur laudari satis digne philosophia poterit, cui qui pareat omne tempus aetatis sine molestia possit degere.

To me, at any rate, the composition of this book has been so delightful that it has not only wiped away all the annoyances of advanced age, but has even made it an easy and a happy state. Philosophy therefore, can never be praised as much as it deserves, since it enables the person who is obedient to its precepts to pass every season of life free from worry.

Cicero, *De Senectute*, 1.2.

Sources

When sources in this study are compared to those reported in previous research, similarities and differences can be seen. Relationship with People, an area of interest for every subject, has been consistently reported as the most frequent source of meaning across the life span (Yalom, 1980; De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981; McCarthy, 1983; Baum, 1988; Baum & Stewart, 1990), although not before by all participants. It is apparent that relating to others is central to issues of meaning.

Both Frankl (1963) and Yalom (1980) emphasised the importance of creativity as a source of meaning. That Creativity was the second most frequent source reported by the people interviewed is consistent with their views. Empirical studies, however, have found creativity less commonly reported. De Vogler and Ebersole's (1980) category Expression was reported by only 4% of the college students they asked to write about three sources of meaning, and, as a result they later included it in the category they called Life Work (1981, 1983). Using Reker and Wong's (1988) categories, Reker and Guppy (1988) found this source was related to perceived physical well-being, but was ranked by young people as ninth, by the middle-aged as tenth, and by the elderly as the second last of twelve options. It is consistent, however, with Erikson's (1963) theory of generativity that people in midlife should find meaning in creativity. The middle-aged people in this study were interested in talking about the meaning in their lives, and were probably experiencing meaning in life more than the general population. They were also enjoying creativity more than subjects in other studies.

The finding that Personal Development was the third most frequently chosen category is also consistent with previous studies. Growth was the third most reported (of eight categories) by college students (De Vogler and Ebersole, 1980); fourth by adults (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981); and fifth equal by young adolescents (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1983). No later life couples (Ebersole & DePaola, 1987) reported growth as a source, but it must be remembered that subjects in that study were asked to write about only the one most important source of meaning in their lives. Reker and Guppy (1988) found personal growth a potent source of meaning related to perceived psychological well-being. Subjects of all ages in their life span study ranked Personal Growth fourth or fifth of the twelve listed.

Relationship with nature was reported by half the participants. As predicted, people enjoying midlife in Aotearoa express their connection to the natural environment as a source of meaning. This source is not referred to in any of the previous studies reviewed. Given its strength in this study, it is surprising that it has not emerged before. People's relationship with the rest of the natural world has rich potential for future study. We may well speculate that there is a relationship between well-being and connectedness to the natural environment, for example. This year, the Waikato Hospital Board decided that Tokanui Hospital, a psychiatric institution located in peaceful countryside near Hamilton, should be closed and psychiatric wards built in a multi-storied complex at Waikato Base Hospital in the city. Newspaper reports (Waikato Times, June 1, 1990) quoted one psychiatrist's concerns that the present site is more therapeutic. He referred to "tree therapy" to describe the positive affect of the natural environment surrounding Tokanui. Meaning may well play an important role in any such relationship between the natural environment and perceived well-being.

The role of Religious and Spiritual activities and beliefs was much less important in the lives of these subjects than those surveyed in three previous studies. It was the fifth of six categories for people in this study, compared to the second for adults (De Vogler & Ebersole 1981), for people over seventy (McCarthy, 1983), and for elderly couples (Ebersole & DePaola, 1987). The present findings however, are consistent with those of Reker and Guppy (1988), who found that Religious activities were ranked as eleventh of twelve by young people, ninth by the middle-aged and eighth by elderly subjects. In that study the twelve sources to be ranked cued subjects' responses, and in this study, the interview procedure encouraged wide exploration of sources of meaning. This may account for the preference for sources other than religious belief and activities in contrast to the methods used by Ebersole and associates, who asked for the single or three most important sources. The effect of keeping Religious and Spiritual and Social and Political categories separate does not account for the low frequency of reporting this category. Relationships, Creativity

and Personal Development were all more frequently discussed as sources of meaning than both of these categories added together.

As predicted, people did talk about the importance of spirituality outside organised religion, which gives support to the expansion of the name of this source to *Religious and Spiritual*. The role of organised religion in people's personal meaning system is not clear. Several questions come to mind while listening to these subjects talk about religion and meaning. How much is religious conviction about belief, and how much about values? What is involved in the construct of "spirituality"? How does spirituality relate to cognition, and how much to affective experiences? What of people's values, world view and beliefs derives from the religious activities they were involved with earlier in their lives and now reject? Future research may address these questions. Previous research has reported a relationship between religious belief and meaning in life (Soderstrom & Wright, 1975; Bolt, 1975; Chamberlain & Zika, 1988b). The stories told in the present study by a group of people of similar age and environments suggest that religious and spiritual sources of meaning are a complex collection of widely diverging ideas, values and feelings.

Although Social and Political was the least reported source, it was described by more than a quarter of the people interviewed, so it does hold up as an important source of meaning. Since a low proportion of people who find meaning in Religious and Spiritual also find it in Social and Political, it is appropriate that these two sources should be regarded as intrinsically different and therefore separate.

The reported sources of meaning did fit into the six categories proposed by the model, but in such a way as to challenge sources as a useful starting point. Some people are aware of the underlying component structure, and talk about ideas, goals and achievement, and refer to various sources as illustrations of these conscious processes. Frequently, finding meaning in one area of a person's life acted as a motivator to explore another area of life. The triangular model proposed by Reker and Wong (1988) might be better conceptualised as a spiral, each experience of meaning acting as a springboard for further and possibly quite different experiences.

The different procedure used in this study may account for some of the difference in findings. Participants were asked to talk about as many sources of meaning in their lives as they thought of during the interview. They were not limited to any number or time, nor did they have a list to rank. Ebersole and his associates (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983; De Vogler & DePaola, 1987) asked subjects to write essays on one to three sources. Reker and Guppy (1988) asked their subjects to rank twelve given sources. Both of these

situations ask people to use pen and paper, and may well be stressful procedures for the participants. There are frequently connotations of "getting it right" when people are asked to write things down.

In this study, participants were invited to self-disclose and to explore their ideas rather than to come up with answers. In the relationship of participant and active listener, different material may have emerged than the same people may have presented in pen and paper reports. As well as describing the areas of their lives in which they experienced meaning, participants pondered issues of meaning in general. The empathy established in this qualitative approach enabled the researcher to understand the inner experience of the person being interviewed. The communication of that understanding enabled the participant to move further and explore this inner world at greater depth. The information gained was in the person's own context, and uniquely their own as well as giving indications of the broader human experience (Stiles, 1990). The process of their self-exploration revealed the dimensions of the structure of meaning.

Components

The components model of the structure of meaning proposed by Reker and Wong (1988) was strongly confirmed. People do describe their experiences of meaning as having cognitive, motivational and affective components. The movement from one component to another in their accounts was at times rapid and in either direction around the components. The three components were present in the descriptions of all but one of the people interviewed. There are two possible explanations for this finding. It may be that without each of these dimensions, an experience lacks meaning. The accounts of social and political belief indicated that without the affective component in one's experiences, a source loses its meaningfulness, supporting Battista and Almond's (1973) suggestion that without fulfilment, it is difficult to retain beliefs about meaning. Secondly, the people who participated in this research were not a random sample, but a group selected because of their willingness to talk about their attitudes and beliefs. It is probable that they experience life as meaningful more than people in general. In the wider population there may be many people whose ideas and experiences of meaning are lacking in one or more of these components, as there was for one participant in this study. A components approach to examining meaning has promise for future research on meaning.

This study accessed the experiences of a small and relatively homogeneous group of people. The model will need to be tested in populations with divergent cultures and world views. Cognitive, motivational and affective dimensions are more likely to generalise to the wider population than sources of meaning. However, we know that culture affects

people's interpretations of life (Yalom, 1980), and the resulting effect on people's ideas and experiences of meaning in life needs to be explored.

Breadth and Depth

Participants reported nearly six categories each, nearly as many as the subjects who were asked to list as all the sources of meaning in their lives (De Vogler-Ebersole & Ebersole, 1985). These sources were sorted into categories and breadth, the diversification of sources of meaning, was adequately portrayed by measuring the number of categories reported.

There were, however, problems with measuring depth. First, it was not simple to calculate a single depth score for each subject. When each person experiences meaning at a variety of depths according to the nature of the experience, a single score does not represent faithfully those depth experiences. In general, experiences of *umwelt* scored deeply at four, the *mitwelt* at three, and experiences of *eigenwelt* scored only two. The De Vogler-Ebersole and Ebersole (1985) method of measuring only one source avoids this problem in a procedural sense, but also fails to represent accurately how people experience depth of meaning, since it samples such a narrow field of an individual's experiences.

Secondly, the levels of transcendence measure used in this research is clearly not an interval scale. The spaces between the four levels are of different sizes, and level one is virtually redundant. More seriously still, there is some evidence that the scale is not truly ordinal. It is possible to transcend one's own concerns at the second level, and arrive directly at the fourth level of cosmic or theological meaning, without moving through the third or other human-oriented level. The concept of increasing degrees of self-transcendence has appeal, but is apparently not a linear process.

Linear measures, of course, imply that the concepts they are measuring are also linear. We have seen that the dynamic process of experiencing cognitive, motivational and affective dimensions of meaning is spiral rather than linear. It may well be that experiencing depth in our meanings is also more accurately depicted as a spiral than a straight line. Matthew Fox (1988) would remind us at this point that life itself is demonstrated as non-linear by the double helix shape of the DNA molecule. Using linear models and measures to examine psychological aspects of living will probably always fall short of capturing the essential process (Stiles, 1990).

Reker and Wong (1988) proposed that people with self-complexity would have greater depth and breadth of meaning than others. De Vogler and Ebersole (1985), on the other hand, suggested that breadth inhibits depth. A low to moderate relationship was found between depth and breadth, suggesting support for the complexity theory. However, little progress was in fact made towards defining and clarifying the relationship, because of the limitations of the depth measure.

IV. ii. The Model

hoc genus in rebus firmandum est multa prius quam
 ipsius rei rationem reddere possis,
 et nimium longis ambagibus est adendum.

In this kind of study, many possibilities have to be considered before you can give the rationale of the process, and you have to approach the answers by exceedingly long and roundabout ways.

Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, VI. 917-920.

The results of this study have had an impact on the model that was proposed in I. iv, as illustrated in Figure 5.

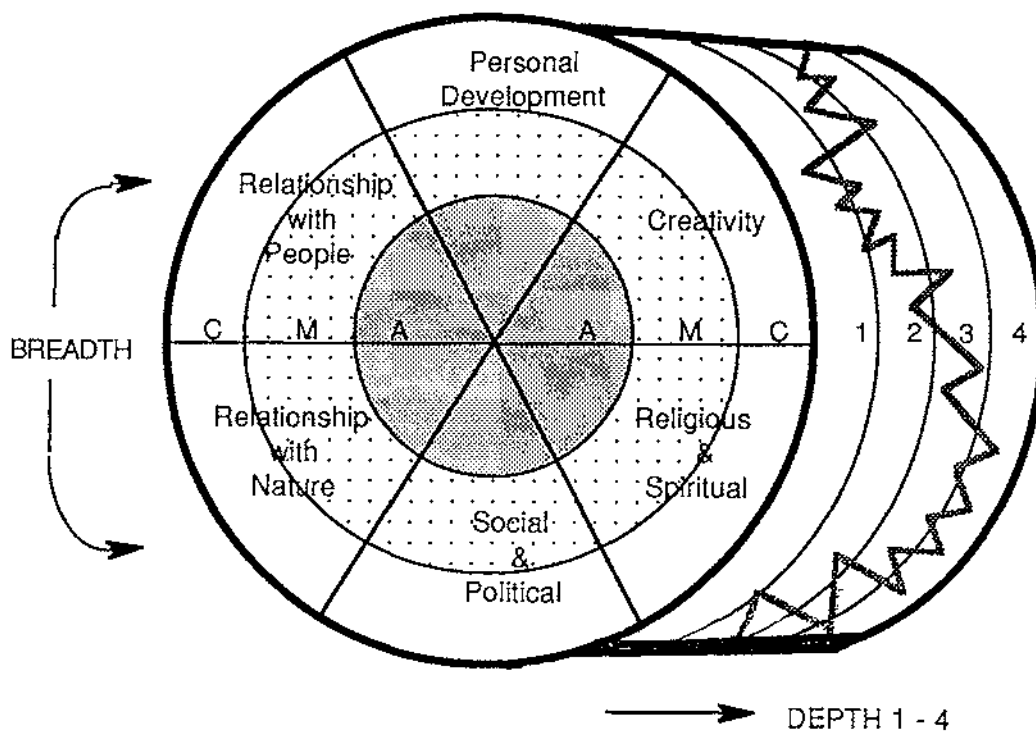


Figure 5. The effect of the study on the model

The surface of the figure displays the six categories of sources. The dimension of categories of sources was found to be an accurate system of sorting the content of people's experiences of meaning. Breadth is the variety of sources, therefore the total number of these six containing each person's reported sources. The dimension of breadth also checked out as an accurate way of capturing the diversification of sources of meaning (Reker & Wong, 1988). Also on the surface of the figure, cutting through the categories of sources, are three concentric circles which represent the three components of meaning; cognitive, motivational and affective. The dimension of components was found to be true in people's accounts of meaning; people's experiences of meaning show the dynamic process of movement from one component to another. The model is a successful if static portrayal of the dimensions of categories of sources, breadth, and components of meaning. The cracked base of the model demonstrates the flaws in this representation of depth.

Previous studies on meaning in life have categorised sources (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1980; Ebersole & De Vogler, 1981; De Vogler & Ebersole, 1983; Ebersole & DePaola, 1987; Reker & Guppy, 1988). Sources and even categories need to be adapted for different groups of people, for example adolescents (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1983; Reker & Guppy, 1988). The addition of a new category in this study is a case in point. The culture of ethnicity is likely to affect sources of meaning even more powerfully than the culture of age.

Another problem with categorisation is the resulting segregation of sources. People in this study indicated that their sources of meaning are not separate from each other, but are instead dynamically interconnected. People's accounts moved from the motivational circle of one source into the outer cognitive circle of another, often quite different source. An experience of meaning can act as a springboard for another new experience of meaning. This suggests that breadth is more than just the range of different sources that a person reports around the model. It may also be the extent of movement among sources.

Another pattern that emerged from people's accounts of their experiences of meaning, was the fact that a third of the people interviewed were able to describe frameworks of personal meaning that they hold in mind consciously. This finding supports the concept of a life-framework as proposed by Battista and Almond (1973). These integrated frameworks tended to be associated with one predominating category of meaning, for example, creativity or relationship with other people. It is as if their concepts of meaning had spiralled up above the face of this figure, and all their experiences of meaning united in an integrated cognitive schema. One cohesive idea incorporated all possible categories, as depicted in Figure 6.

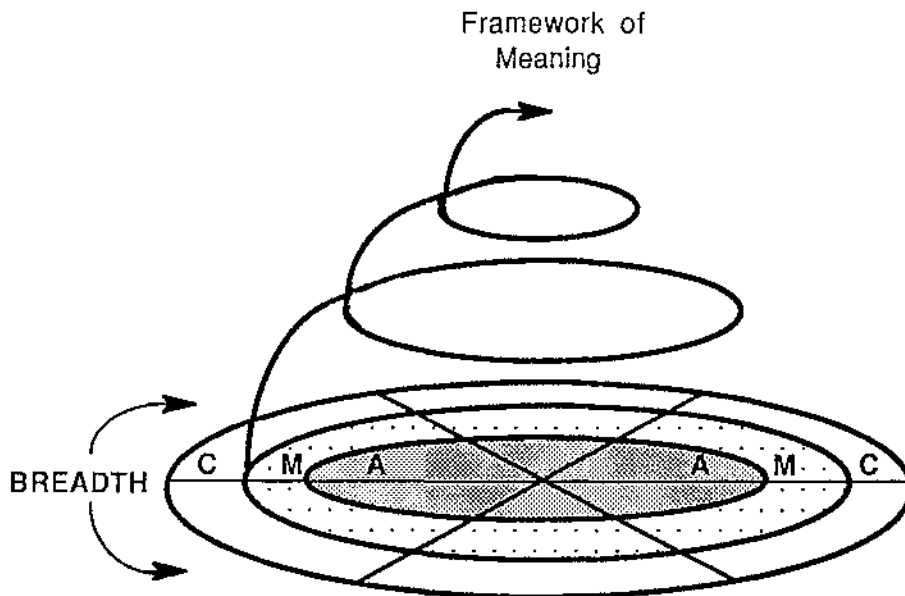


Figure 6. Framework of meaning

The concept of depth as four layers underneath the category segments was not strongly supported by the research. The degrees of self-transcendence did not increase in linear fashion. The base was uneven according to which segment was found to have meaning. The four layers were of different thickness, and sometimes a layer would almost disappear altogether. Depth is not well described as four tidy levels of self-transcendence as proposed by Reker and Wong (1988). Perhaps the subjective rating of depth (De Vogler-Ebersole & Ebersole, 1985) approaches more closely the truth of people's experience, although it does cause difficulties of measurement (Ebersole & Kobayakawa, 1989). The dimension of depth of meaning is non-linear. Experiences of depth may integrate and spiral down from the whole range of sources and categories of meaning, each experience taking us deeper and deeper to a single point below. In the words of one of the participants:

There does seem to be a cycle or spiral pattern in the re-occurring of 'thinking about meaning in life'. Both major and trivial events trigger each new layer of thought. Each time understanding deepens (Claudia).

Figure 7 illustrates this concept.

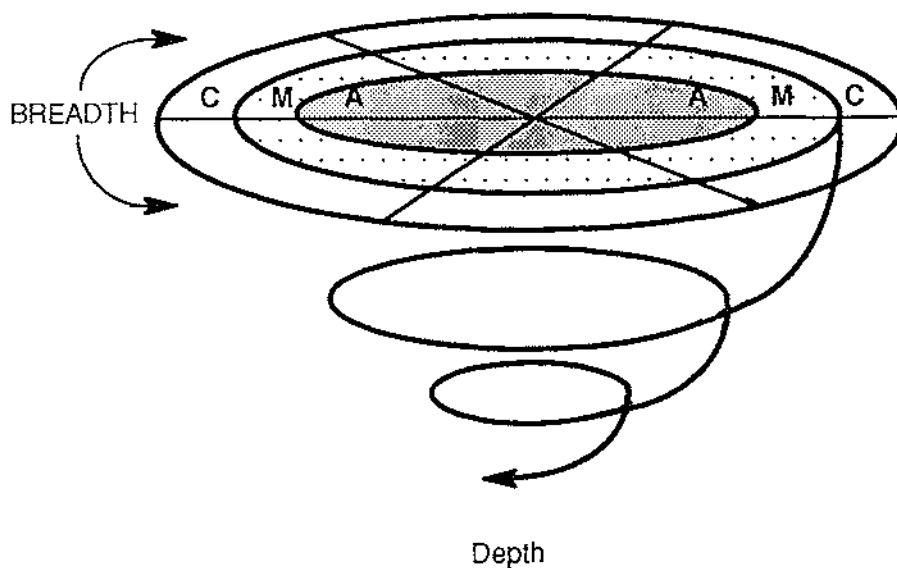


Figure 7. Dimension of depth.

The model proposed before the interviews was revised according to the principle of reflexivity (Lather, 1986). The exploration of people's ideas and stories about meaning in their lives largely supported the theory being tested. Moreover, further information about meaning in life emerged. Dynamic processes of movement between experiences of meaning were uncovered, and complex frameworks of personal meaning were found. The theory has been changed by the new data, and a new form of the model has emerged. This new model is non-linear to reflect more accurately the experiences described by the people interviewed (Stiles, 1990). The revised model is presented in Figure 8.

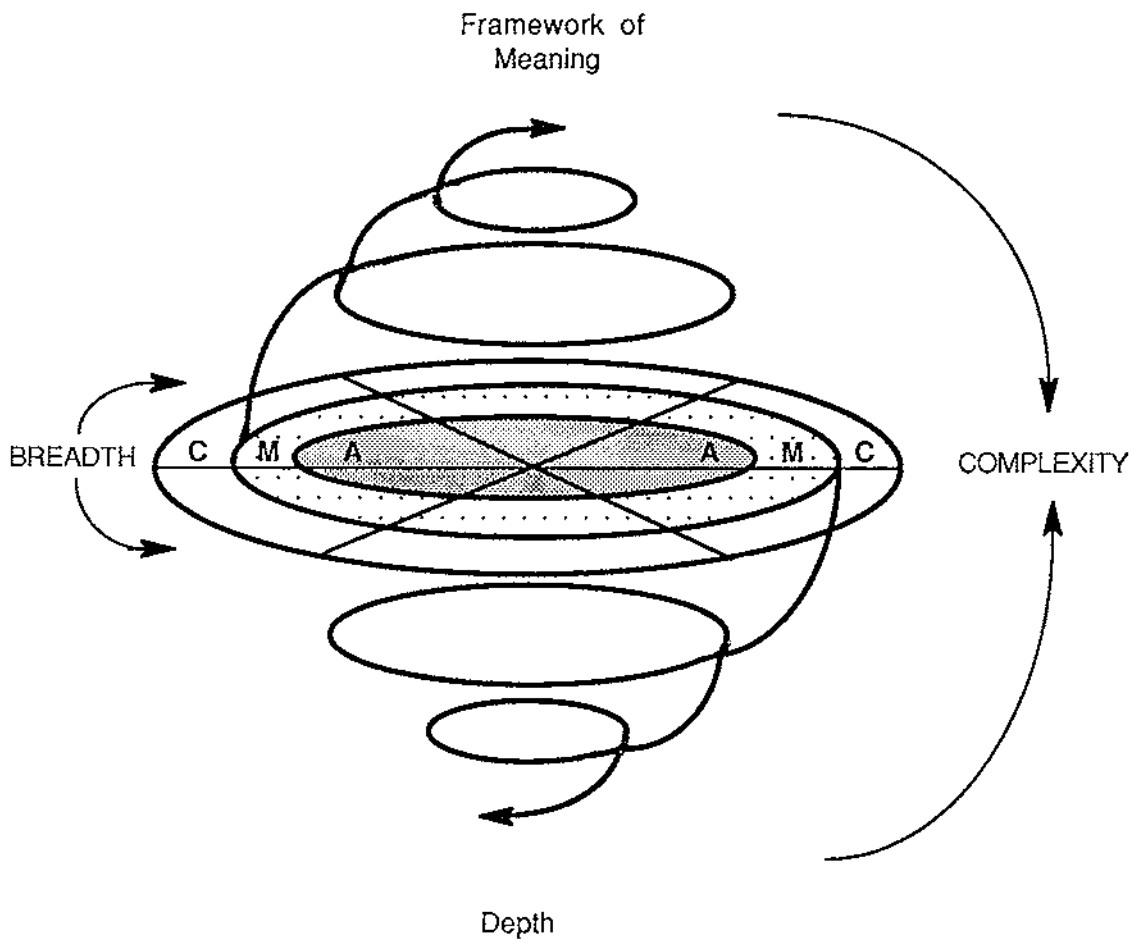


Figure 8. The dimensions of meaning: A non-linear model

New experiences of meaning are integrated into the existing framework which is flexible. Reker and Wong (1988) suggest that a highly differentiated and integrated personal meaning system enables optimal adaptation. People who have complex meaning systems are capable of divergent thinking, and can therefore entertain alternative constructions of reality. Breadth (diversification of sources of meaning) is part of complexity, and will therefore be a dimension of the personal meaning system of a person with high levels of self-complexity. In this model, breadth is part of the process of the formation of an integrated framework of meaning. Depth, (the quality of experiences of meaning) is another aspect of self-complexity, and is represented in the revised model as a unified and dynamic process. Perhaps for some people breadth does inhibit depth, as suggested by De Vogler-Ebersole and Ebersole (1985). People with complex personal meaning systems however, are likely to have high degrees of both breadth and depth. In the context of personal complexity, the framework of meaning and the concept of depth come together.

The proposed model was largely confirmed by research, especially in the dimensions of components and categories. Depth required some modification as it was discovered to be non-linear. Categories and components integrate into cognitive schemata which, together with depth, contribute to the complexity of personal meaning systems. The model was revised in accordance with the personal accounts of the participants in the research, and takes account of the dynamic processes of meaning in life.

IV. iii. Conclusion

haec sei pernosces, parva perductus opella
 cetera iam poteris per te tute ipse uidere.
 namque alid ex alio clarescet nec tibi caeca
 nox iter eripiet quin ultima natural
 pervideas; ita res accendent lumina rebus.

If you recognise the truth of this study, it will not take you much trouble to see the rest for yourself; for one thing is clarified by another, and blind night will not take away your journey until you can see into the innermost meanings of life; so clearly do the ideas presented here throw light on them.

Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. I. 1113-1117

People's stories do tell us some of the essence of what is going on, at least for them. These interviews with 38 citizens of Aotearoa in midlife has confirmed that people do experience meaning in a wide range of areas in their lives. In each of these aspects of their lives, they experience meaning in their ideas and beliefs, their values and goals, and in their achievements, satisfactions and pleasures. The degree to which these experiences are self-transcending varies according to the mode of being-in-the-world they are experiencing; the biological world, in relation to other people, or in relation to themselves. Possibly, they transcend their own concerns more if they find meaning in a variety of different areas of human concern and activity. Some believe that meaning is out there somewhere to be discovered, others that it needs to be constructed in an otherwise meaningless world. For most, it is an important concept and is central to the midlife task of evaluating and restructuring life's priorities (Levinson et al., 1978; Cytrynbaum et al., 1980).

Listening to these people's stories has clarified that the multidimensional approach tells us more about the nature of meaningful experiences than the previous method of comparing sources of meaning. Reker and Wong's (1988) theory of the structure of meaning is an important contribution to research of meaning in life. Exploring the process of people's experiences of meaning is more fruitful than analysing the content.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Procedure

Preparation

First, give the subject the Information sheet to read, and plenty of opportunity to clarify what is going to happen, and how it will happen. Allow time for the subject to settle and rapport to be established before turning on the recorder and asking the first question.

Information Sheet

<p>MEANING IN LIFE</p> <p>I am interested in finding out about people's experiences of meaning in their lives.</p> <p>I am going to ask you to tell me about the sources of meaning in your life; the areas of your life that you experience as having meaning.</p> <p>I am also interested in your idea of the over all picture, of how these things fit together into what meaning life has for you.</p> <p>When you are ready, I will ask you to tell me about one important source of meaning for you; one area of your life that you experience as having meaning.</p>

Interview Format

1.
 - What do you think of as the main thing in your life that gives your life meaning?
 - Ask clarifying questions, eliciting examples, cognitive, motivational and affective aspects.
 - Check for depth indicators, asking further clarifying questions where necessary, e.g. How does what you have told me about....fit into any wider view you have of meaning?
 - Use participant's own words where possible.
2. Repeat the procedure until the subject has reported all the sources of meaning. Check that they haven't left out anything they think is important.
3. Record source in subject's words on checklist. Check as response fits cognitive, motivational and affective aspects, or when probes have been given. Note when depth has been probed.

Appendix B.

Coding Frame

For each subject:

1. Note source, and category for source
2. Code each source for cognitive, motivational and affective components
3. Code each source for depth
4. Code each subject for breadth (total sources x categories)

Sources into Categories

Relationship with People.

Relationships with children, partner, family, friends, people in general, and people related activities (work with people, socialising,) and people related satisfactions (legacy, making a contribution to society)

Relationship with Nature.

Connectedness to other species, forms of life, nature conscious activities, enjoyment of physicality

Religious & Spiritual.

Religious and spiritual ideas, values, beliefs and activities

Political & Social.

Commitment to political activity, party or pressure group affiliation, social causes.

Personal Development.

Self development, ongoing learning and change, self responsibility

Creativity.

Includes art, music, literature, drama, craft, etc., active or passive

Components

Cognitive.

Beliefs, understanding, interpretation; make sense of own experience in life; cosmic meaning; understanding of specific events .

Motivational.

Individual's value system dictating which goals to choose, pursuing the chosen goals, becoming involved in activities, and attaining them, leading to a sense of purpose, worthwhile ends.

Affective.

Feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment, happiness, sense of achievement, pleasure

Depth

Rate depth 1, 2, 3 or 4 according to the content of the responses in each source. The final rating for each source will be the deepest (greatest number).

1. Self-preoccupation with hedonistic pleasure and comfort.

2. Devotion of time and energy to the realisation of their potential for example, personal growth, creativity and self-actualisation.
3. From self-interest to service to others and commitment to a larger societal or political cause.
4. Entertaining values that transcend individuals and encompass cosmic meaning and ultimate purpose.

Check the response for internalisation and recent development. Check for specific examples of current experiences. If it is clear that the response is shallow, or no specific instances are forthcoming, rate the response at the next level that does show internalisation and recent development.

If more than one level is mentioned, rate at the deepest mentioned.

Appendix C

Data

Table C-1. Data: Rater One

S	SOURCES INTO CATEGORIES X DEPTH										S	BREADTH		DEPTH			
	People				Nature	SocPol	Religion	Creativity	PersDvpmnt			Tot	Total K	Tot	Ave		
1	3	3			4			4	2	2		6	5	18	3		
2	3	3	2	3	4				4	2		7	4	21	3		
3	2	2	2					2	2	2	2	7	4	14	2		
4	3	3			4	2		4	4	3		7	4	23	3.29		
5	3	3	3		4			4	3	3	2	8	5	25	3.13		
6	3	3			3				2		2	5	4	13	2.6		
7	2	2	2	3							2	2	6	2	13	2.17	
8	4	4			4		4		2			5	4	18	3.6		
9	3	3	3						2			4	2	11	2.75		
10	4	4			4		4				2	4	6	4	22	3.67	
11	3						3	4	4	3	2	2	7	4	21	3	
12	3	3	4		4				3			5	3	17	3.4		
13	4	3	3		4	1						5	2	15	3		
14	3	3	3		4		4		4			6	4	21	3.5		
15	3	3						4	2	4	2	6	4	18	3		
16	3	4	3	3				4			2	3	7	3	22	3.14	
17	3	2							2		2	2	2	6	3	13	2.17
18	4	3			1				1	4		5	3	13	2.6		
19	4	4			4		3		4		2	6	5	21	3.5		
20	4	4			4		4		2		3	4	7	5	25	3.57	
21	3				4			4			2	3	5	4	16	3.2	
22	3	3	3	2					3	1		6	2	15	2.5		
23	4	3			3				4			4	3	14	3.5		
24	3	3			4			4	3			5	4	17	3.4		
25	4				4			4	2		3	5	5	17	3.4		
26	3	3						4			4	2	5	3	16	3.2	
27	4				4				2		2	2	5	4	14	2.8	
28	3	3	3					4	2	3	3	7	4	21	3		
29	3	3			4		3	4	2	3	3	3	9	6	28	3.11	
30	3	3						2			1	4	3	9	2.25		
31	3	3	3									3	1	9	3		
32	3	3	3	3	3			4			3	7	4	19	2.71		
33	3	1	2					2			3	2	1	7	3	14	2
34	3	2	3					3		2	2	6	4	15	2.5		
35	3	4	4		4		4	2	4	3	2	9	6	30	3.33		
36	4	4					4	4	4	4		5	4	20	4		
37	3	3									2	2	4	2	10	2.5	
38	3	3					3	4	3		2	6	5	18	3		

S	SOURCES INTO CATEGORIES X DEPTH									S		BREADTH		DEPTH	
	People			Nature	SocPol	Religion	Creativity	PersDvpm		Tot	Total K	Tot	Ave		
1	3	3		4		4	2	2		6	5	18	3		
2	3	3	2	3	4		2	2		7	4	19	2.71		
3	2	2				2	2	2	2	7	4	14	2		
4	2			4	2		2	3	4	7	4	19	2.71		
5	3	4	4	4		4	2	2		7	5	23	3.29		
6	4	3		3			3	2		5	4	15	3		
7	2	1	2	3				2	2	6	2	12	2		
8	4	4		4	4		2			5	4	18	3.6		
9	3	3	3				2			4	2	11	2.75		
10	4	4		4	4			2	4	6	4	22	3.67		
11	3				3	4	4	3	2	7	4	21	3		
12	3	3	3	3	4		3			6	3	19	3.17		
13	2	3	2		1		2			5	3	10	2		
14	3	3		4	4		4	3		6	5	21	3.5		
15	3	3		4		4	2	2		6	5	18	3		
16	3	4	3	3		4		2	3	7	3	22	3.14		
17	3	1					2	2	2	6	3	12	2		
18	4	3		1			1	4		5	3	13	2.6		
19	4				3		4	4	4	6	4	21	3.5		
20	4	4		4	3		2	2	4	7	5	23	3.29		
21	3			4		4		2	3	5	4	16	3.2		
22	4	3	2	3			3	1		6	2	16	2.67		
23	4	3		3			4			4	3	14	3.5		
24	4	3		4		4	3			5	4	18	3.6		
25	4			4		4	2	3		5	5	17	3.4		
26	3	3				4		2	2	5	3	14	2.8		
27	4			4			2	4	2	5	4	16	3.2		
28	3	3	3			4	2	3	2	7	4	20	2.86		
29	2	3		4	3		4	2	2	9	5	26	2.89		
30	3	3				2		1		4	3	9	2.25		
31	3	3	3							3	1	9	3		
32	4	3	3	3	3	4		4		7	3	21	3		
33	3	2	2			2		3	2	7	3	15	2.14		
34	4	3			4		2	3	2	6	4	18	3		
35	3	3	4	4	4	4	1	2		8	6	25	3.13		
36	4	4			4	4	4			5	4	20	4		
37	3	3						2	2	4	2	10	2.5		
38	3	3			3	4	3	2		6	5	18	3		

Table C-3. Final Data

S	SOURCES INTO CATEGORIES X DEPTH										S	BREADTH		DEPTH	
	People			Nature	Soc/Pol	Religion	Creativity	PersDvprnt				Tot	Total K	Tot	Ave
1	3	3		4		4	2	2			6	5	18	3	
2	3	3	2	3	4		4	2			7	4	21	3	
3	2	2				2	2	2	2		7	4	14	2	
4	3	3		4	2		4	3	4		7	4	23	3.29	
5	3	4	3	4		4	3	2			7	5	23	3.29	
6	3	3		3			3	2			5	4	14	2.8	
7	2	2	2	3				2	2		6	2	13	2.17	
8	4	4		4	4		2				5	4	18	3.6	
9	3	3	3				2				4	2	11	2.75	
10	4	4		4	4			2	4		6	4	22	3.67	
11	3				3	4	4	3	2	2	7	4	21	3	
12	3	3	3	3	4		3				6	3	19	3.17	
13	4	3	2		4	1					5	2	14	2.8	
14	3	3	3	4	4		4				6	4	21	3.5	
15	3	3				4	2	4	2		6	4	18	3	
16	3	4	3	3		4			2	3	7	3	22	3.14	
17	3	2					2	2	2	2	6	3	13	2.17	
18	4	3		1			1	4			5	3	13	2.6	
19	4	4		4	3		4	2			6	5	21	3.5	
20	4	4		4	4		2	3	4		7	5	25	3.57	
21	3			4		4			2	3	5	4	16	3.2	
22	3	3	2	3			3	1			6	2	15	2.5	
23	4	3		3			4				4	3	14	3.5	
24	4	3		4		4	3				5	4	18	3.6	
25	4			4		4	2	3			5	5	17	3.4	
26	3	3				4			2	2	5	3	14	2.8	
27	4			4			2	4	2		5	4	16	3.2	
28	3	3	3			4	2	3	3		7	4	21	3	
29	3	3		4	3	4	2	2	3	3	9	6	27	3	
30	3	3				2			1		4	3	9	2.25	
31	3	3	3								3	1	9	3	
32	3	3	3	3	3		4			3	7	3	22	3.14	
33	3	1	2			2			3	2	7	3	14	2	
34	3	3	3		3		2		2		6	4	16	2.67	
35	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	2			8	6	28	3.5	
36	4	4			4	4	4				5	4	20	4	
37	3	3							2	2	4	2	10	2.5	
38	3	3			3	4	3	2			6	5	18	3	

Table C-4: Reliability

S	SOURCES		CATEGORIES		COMPONENTS		DEPTH	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1	6	0	6	0	18	0	6	0
2	7	0	7	0	21	0	6	1
3	7	0	6	1	21	0	7	0
4	7	0	5	2	21	0	4	3
5	7	1	7	0	24	0	4	3
6	5	0	5	0	18	0	3	2
7	6	0	6	0	18	0	5	1
8	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
9	4	0	4	0	12	0	4	0
10	6	0	6	0	18	0	6	0
11	7	0	7	0	21	0	7	0
12	5	1	5	1	18	0	5	1
13	5	0	4	1	12	0	3	2
14	6	0	5	1	18	0	6	0
15	6	0	5	1	18	0	6	0
16	7	0	7	0	21	0	7	0
17	6	0	6	0	18	0	5	1
18	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
19	6	0	5	1	18	0	6	0
20	7	0	7	0	21	0	5	2
21	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
22	6	0	6	0	18	0	5	1
23	4	0	4	0	12	0	4	0
24	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
25	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
26	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
27	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
28	7	0	7	0	21	0	6	1
29	9	0	9	0	27	0	7	2
30	4	0	4	0	12	0	4	0
31	3	0	3	0	9	0	3	0
32	7	0	7	0	21	0	5	2
33	7	0	7	0	21	0	6	1
34	6	0	5	1	18	0	2	4
35	8	0	8	0	24	0	6	2
36	5	0	5	0	15	0	5	0
37	4	0	4	0	12	0	4	0
38	6	0	6	0	18	0	6	0
Agreements	221		213		669		193	
Disagreements	2		9		0		29	
Total	223		222		669		222	
% Reliability	99.1		95.946		100		86.937	

Table C-5. Individual Depth Scores

DEPTH SCORES										
SUB	1. PEOPLE	2. NATURE	3. S/P	4. RELIGN	5. CREAT	6. PERS D	TOTAL	AVE	SCORE	BREADTH
1	3	4	0	4	2	2	15	2.5	3	5
2	3	4	0	0	4	2	13	2.17	3.25	4
3	2	0	0	2	2	2	8	1.33	2	4
4	3	4	0	0	4	4	15	2.5	3.75	4
5	4	4	0	4	3	2	17	2.83	3.4	5
6	3	3	0	0	3	2	11	1.83	2.75	4
7	3	0	0	0	0	2	5	0.83	2.5	2
8	4	4	4	0	2	0	14	2.33	3.5	4
9	3	0	0	0	2	0	5	0.83	2.5	2
10	4	4	4	0	0	4	16	2.67	4	4
11	3	0	4	0	4	2	13	2.17	3.25	4
12	3	4	0	0	3	0	10	1.67	3.33	3
13	4	4	0	0	0	0	8	1.33	4	2
14	3	4	4	0	4	0	15	2.5	3.75	4
15	3	0	0	4	4	2	13	2.17	3.25	4
16	4	0	0	4	0	3	11	1.83	3.67	3
17	3	0	0	0	2	2	7	1.17	2.33	3
18	4	1	0	0	4	0	9	1.5	3	3
19	4	4	3	0	4	2	17	2.83	3.4	5
20	4	4	4	0	2	4	18	3	3.6	5
21	3	4	0	4	0	3	14	2.33	3.5	4
22	3	0	0	0	3	0	6	1	3	2
23	4	3	0	0	4	0	11	1.83	3.67	3
24	4	4	0	4	3	0	15	2.5	3.75	4
25	4	4	0	4	2	3	17	2.83	3.4	5
26	3	0	0	4	0	2	9	1.5	3	3
27	4	4	0	0	2	4	14	2.33	3.5	4
28	3	0	0	4	3	3	13	2.17	3.25	4
29	3	4	3	4	2	3	19	3.17	3.17	6
30	3	0	0	2	0	1	6	1	2	3
31	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.5	3	1
32	3	0	0	4	0	3	10	1.67	3.33	3
33	3	0	0	2	0	3	8	1.33	2.67	3
34	3	0	3	0	2	2	10	1.67	2.5	4
35	4	4	4	4	3	2	21	3.5	3.5	6
36	4	0	4	4	4	0	16	2.67	4	4
37	3	0	0	0	0	2	5	0.83	2.5	2
38	3	0	3	4	3	2	15	2.5	3	5
Σ	94	22	12	18	33	43				
M	3.34	3.75	3.64	3.65	2.99	2.52				
SD	0.6	0.96	0.51	0.86	0.93	0.72				

Appendix D

Follow-up

Example letter to participants

Frank L. Victor
[REDACTED]

Dear Frank

Earlier this year, I interviewed you about your ideas and experiences of meaning in your life. I would like to give you a summary of what we talked about, and check with you that you think that this is what happened.

I asked you to talk to me about sources of meaning in your life. You talked about your spiritual beliefs and values, the importance of interpersonal relationships, and creativity as areas that you experience as meaningful. We explored how you experienced meaning, and you told me about your ideas and beliefs, values and goals and satisfactions in each of these areas. You also spoke of your belief in the importance of self-transcendence as the over-all framework for experiences of meaning in your life.

Since we talked, you may well have had further thoughts about meaning in life. I would like to know what, if any, effect our conversation has had on you.

It has been a privilege for me to speak to people about such deeply personal and precious aspects of their lives. I have now a lot of valuable material on the way people between 40 and 50 view their lives, past present and future, and would like to include in my report some quotes from some people to illustrate key points. For this reason, I would like your permission to quote from what you said in my final report. The names of participants are kept confidential and any quotes will be used in a manner to ensure that no one can be identified.

It is very important to me that you reply to this letter. I have included a freepost envelope to make responding as easy as possible for you. Please return the enclosed questionnaire by September 30.

I will write to you again with a summary of the findings when I complete the report. Thank you for your cooperation and generosity of spirit.

Yours sincerely,

Kay O'Connor

MEANING IN LIFE

Follow-up Questionnaire

Please tick the appropriate boxes and answer the following questions and return this paper to me in the envelope provided. (Please use more paper if you would like to reply at greater length.)

1. In my letter, I gave you a summary of the sources of meaning you told me about.

Is this how you remember our conversation?

yes	no

If no, what would you like to add or subtract?

2. Since we spoke, have you thought of other sources of meaning, areas of your life that you experience as meaningful?

If yes, what are they?

yes	no

3. Have you thought more about your ideas on any wider or connecting picture of meaning?

If yes, please describe these ideas.

yes	no

4. What effect, if any, did the interview have on your awareness of meaning in your life?

5. Are you willing to be quoted (anonymously) in the final report?

yes	no

Kay O'Connor
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Palmerston North

Appendix E

Quotations from Interviews

The following excerpts from the audio-taped interviews are arranged by category of source of meaning under sub-headings of the cognitive, motivational or affective component of meaning which predominates.

Relationship with People

Cognitive.

Those moments of connection...those moments of mutual understanding when people are saying 'yes' together (Charles).

What is important is the quality time shared. That is the sharing of feelings, the sharing of doubts, the sharing of vulnerabilities, the incapable, the part that people very seldom do see and that would give my life meaning. It's easy to have the strength, but the vulnerable part is the other half that gives my life meaning. If I didn't have the vulnerability and didn't have the powerlessness that is easy to get in touch with if things go wrong — those would be the parts and those are the parts I choose to share with those who are close to me (Elizabeth).

I think that all people are equally valuable and I like to know about their different approaches to life. People bring a richness to life, and if they do it for me, then we all do it for each other, if we allow it to happen, there's an added richness to life just because of the different experiences that people have. The thinkers challenge me and so do those who with gay abandonment just get on and live. My life is richer for other people and I am sure that multiplies out. The more experiences we have the richer our lives will be, and the richer our community will be too (Judith).

Motivational.

(The meaning I find in relationships) is reflected in my work. My work is people oriented, and if I didn't have a belief in the value of personal relationships, then I wouldn't be doing the work that I am doing (Patricia).

Friendship is one of the bases of my life. Relationships in the wisest sense with friends is the basis of my existence. I see myself as an individual and connected strongly as if I am roped to them, to hundreds of people, people who provide me with a sense of who I am, people who provide me with support and friendship and fun - fun is very important. Friends reinforce each others' values and goals. Think of the number of times you sit with a friend and bounce off ideas about what it is you want to do with your life. There's no way I could be self sufficient about what I'm doing, what I'm thinking, what I want to create, who I want to be, without my friends, because they are part of my ideas on life (Sarah).

Affective.

I get a surprising amount of satisfaction from...interaction with people....I really didn't think that the job as such would have that as its prime motivation. When I took it up...it was scientific, all quite clinical....I get most satisfaction now from the people (Matthew).

Predicament and experience and striving; that's an integral part of how I feel about my existence and the meaning of life, big life, big letters. Universality....It makes me feel in harmony with the order of things, this flow, it makes me feel that I belong in it (Mercedes).

Relationship with Nature

Cognitive.

I think that one of humanity's great problems is that we are basically animals with animal instincts and we are no longer in tune with nature, we are completely ignoring nature. We build, we dam up our valleys, we cut down our forests, I think we are slowly destroying our planet, because we have stopped having this feeling for nature (Daniel).

(The Turkana tribe) live in extremely harsh conditions. Their diet is blood and milk, and the amount of water available to them is very tiny. They live and die according to their environment literally....If I were thrown out into that world to survive as they do I would die within 24 hours....I know we can't go back, but I felt we take for granted things like turning on a light switch for electricity and turning in a heater for warmth and shelter, and running water- 90% of the world don't have running water. I felt that we in the western world are privileged in what we have...but on the other hand I feel we have lost something. Those Turkana people have retained some aspect of harmony with nature that I have lost and I lament that loss. I feel as though we in the western world have become divorced from the rest of our environment, and we are out of touch with it and I don't know how we regain it. They live with their environment and they have to live with it, they can't work against it or they die (Jack).

This little universe that we are on and it is simply that, it is a little universe that we are on, and it and the life that exists within it is mutually connected, nothing is exclusive of anything else, and the pattern of our little planet in the universe that we are in is just one of many and they are all interrelated again like the interrelationships of people (Patricia).

I guess it gives a point to the whole thing, because it says here I am this is me I'm important and I am a part of all of this grand scheme of things which at this particular point in time I am able to experience. Over the millennium of the years, I am just a dot in the whole experience, but right now I am the dot and that is me, and this is all mine to experience and be part of (April).

I think that everything on earth has an energy of its own and its all part of the cosmic energy (Jeannette).

Motivational

Where man, and it is man, falls down terribly, is by believing that lower order animals don't have rights....We have rights and responsibilities because we have the power to reason, because we have the power to create things, and to change things, we have responsibilities to other living creatures (Patricia).

You do a lot of weeding and hoeing and tilling of the soil, but it all grows by itself. It gives you a fairly positive attitude that there's certainly a hell of a lot of life going on out there. It costs nothing, and you get the pleasure of seeing something beautiful in a small area (Martha).

I get a lot of enjoyment out of seeing things like clouds and colours shapes and forms and that's why I like going off and paddling in canoes. Its a lot to do with seeing and feeling things, touching things, having water trickling past or rushing past; being catapulted around, and jostled around by the water. There's a lot of pleasure, a lot of enjoyment there (William).

Affective

It's beautiful when you get...to a place like Great Barrier or in the Marlborough Sounds and there's nobody there but you. You really get the feeling of the meaning in

life then, because you just — the majesty of the scenery, you can feel it, you can feel the power of whatever has created it. It's just wonderful, just sitting in the dusk watching the superb sunset. I mean, that is what makes life meaningful to you (Martha).

(I like to) listen to the sea or watch the sun set or listen to the birds, go for a swim, collect mussels. These are things that I am quite content to do on my own. There is this feeling of being alone, not lonely, and I think there is a difference....I can't think of any other words to describe it other than just going there and being there. I guess meditation comes into it or even just day dreaming or just sitting and listening to the sea. Sometimes I take my guitar and write some music (Richard).

Religious and Spiritual

Cognitive

I believe that there is a God. I was brought up as a Presbyterian. I am more concerned to be a Christian or a God-fearing person than a Presbyterian. I'm not just interested in the Christian faith. I find people who belong to other faiths are God's children just as I am. I can't say one is better than the other (Prue).

I believe in someone greater than me, who cares, and with whom I can have a relationship....It takes me from the present and gives me a long vision...which helps me cope with the issues of everyday life. People who have faith can look beyond what is crowding in at any time take them outside themselves, not only between them and their God, but also between them and the people around them (Judith).

(Spirituality) gives the overall picture. It gives me something that expands and contracts to fit in all the little bits of meaning. I see it more as a global concept. There is some meaning to life, there must be some meaning to life, and therefore there are lots of other bits that make up my meanings in life, but this one seems to be the one that expands enough to cover them all (Elizabeth).

My life is a loan, it doesn't really belong to me. It belongs to God (Nadia).

Motivational.

If we look at those unifying forces that have continued from one generation to the other, we don't have to look far before we can find a church. Because the Christian doctrine, although it is interpreted differently by different denominations, essentially demands co-operation, it demands love (Stephen).

I have a personal belief system. I guess it stems from my (Presbyterian) upbringing, but it has gone much beyond that. Now I don't have anything to do with organised religion or church systems, I see them as narrowing and confining and condemning....I prefer not to be judgemental about other people's approaches to life in the way I see organised religions force people to be very judgemental. That is one of the key things that causes me to move away from organised religions, that judgemental punitive quality (Kaye).

Affective.

I enjoy the fellowship with other worshippers....I think of God as a father, someone I can trust, who gives me reassurance (Nadia).

The experience is of an excitement of looking at things from a wider perspective. So I would see (Spirituality) as linking into life and death, and into understanding why particular things happen, where people get strength from, where people feel lost when they turn away from; all those things. Although I belong to a particular faith, I don't see it from a religious base (Elizabeth).

Social and Political

Cognitive.

It is a sense of being part of the human predicament. The underlying theme that goes through the whole thing is the contribution I can make to all this, the richness of the things that an individual person can offer, the uniqueness of each person's contribution. Valuing one's own contribution gives life meaning in the context of all the other contributions that are made as well. One is part of a higher order of existence, higher than just being an animal, although that is part of it. It's universality (Mercedes).

I find ideas exciting and brilliant and interesting and I think that without them we wouldn't have made any moves or changes in the world at all. Without extremists and without ideas there is no change, there is no movement....I can remember the day I read *The Female Eunuch*. I was angry for weeks after it (Hannah).

Motivational.

During the time we have in this life, we should try always to protect people from harm and ensure that the rights of children should be protected. I'm talking about those well recognised rights of access to education, to medical care, to be housed, to be loved, to be treated as worthwhile. While there may not be much neglect of those issues in New Zealand, it does exist. Even from New Zealand, people can give support to those who are in want beyond our shores. I and others like me try in small ways to influence our government to be a humane government and to be concerned with the nations who experience pressures we hardly know, and to give foreign aid (Stephen).

My political beliefs are beliefs about equality. My beliefs are centred around eradicating the things which have plagued us this century, fascism and racism. I am involved in protest and activism to get rid of the inequalities that stop people from expressing their innate creativity. Passing these values on is important. I won't win the war, but I'll win some battles (Sarah).

Affective.

(I experience) great satisfactions and frustrations, but mainly satisfactions, because I feel that even if I work really hard towards some goal and it's blocked by a higher power or higher body somewhere along the line in the social structure, at least my little bit has raised awareness in others around me (April).

Creativity

Cognitive.

(Music) is an international language, it can communicate across language barriers and I think it touches chords, which are common in all people, no matter what our backgrounds are. Music in its varied forms, can touch primeval instincts in us which can generate all sorts of emotions in us. Music is a very powerful...form of communication, which can reach people who would not otherwise be able to reach each other (Jack).

You interpret other people's creativity, but you have your own perception of it. Everybody can look at a painting and they will see the same thing physically, but they will have their own perception of it. Everybody can listen to a hymn or a prayer or piece of music, but they will have their own perception of it. Meaning for me is reading, thinking, listening, looking, and being very clear about what I think and forming my own perceptions of it. That's meaningful for me. I am clarifying what I think I can do, and what I want. I find other people's creativity enormously stimulating. I can't get enough of it. I use it to reflect back on. The satisfaction of reading, listening to and looking at beautiful things...I feel satisfied; fulfilled in a way. I don't do it enough. A lot of that activity is suppressed by the Protestant work ethic (Sarah).

Motivational.

I go through stages where I paint a lot because I feel I have got to, that I have got something I want to get out of my system. Then also I have got to paint some pictures that other people want me to paint for them....It is part of me, and it always has been. I think I am a creative person anyway, because I like cooking and I like gardening, and doing things that are creative. I like being a sort of earth person, I suppose (Martha).

There's a practical side of me which likes to see something physical and concrete. I've enjoyed building my garage. There is that creative side, that need for expression. I don't see my children as an expression of me, they are an expression of themselves. My relationship with them is an expression of me, and them, in inter-reaction. There is another side of me that is the individual who wants to express himself. I write poetry, I draw, and I'd like to do more of that, and I build. I'd really like to spend more time writing (Charles).

Affective.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure. It's the practical part of having the design in your head and trying to put it physically on to paper and do it. It's the same thing with making jewellery; it's basically like engineering, only smaller. It's hard work and it's physical, and you are soldering and all that sort of thing. It's having the ability to do it with your hands, but also having the picture in your head and making it come out the way that you want it. (Maxine)

(Drama) is a real outlet for the other bits of me that don't otherwise get a chance to come out....I do play a lot of roles in my life. Each day is created; how am I going to tackle today. Each role is a challenge....I enjoy creating fantasies that other people can relate to (Rebecca).

Personal Development**Cognitive.**

At that crisis point I thought that there must be something more than this; this can't be it all. Then I looked outside and did quite a lot of work, personal development work, I suppose you could call it, but a more spiritually based personal development work. That led me to the path that says why am I always looking out there when in actual fact what I could be doing is looking in here. Some of the processes that I went through made that quite clear for me. I do have the answers to most of the questions that I need to ask. What I have to do is listen to myself, acknowledge the spirituality within....I looked at all those issues and that's given me a direction now. I don't have to go looking everywhere for these things. What I have to do is be still and listen and I can focus on and get answers to most of the things that I actually need to know (Richard).

Behind it all there is a seeking, that's why I love looking at ideas, the whole world of ideas. When I am reading something and it clicks within me, it's like moments of insight, knowing I am in communication with the person who wrote the idea (Charles).

Motivational.

Self responsibility is important. If I am not happy, I have to find why I am not happy and work through that....I have learned to be assertive. I have to keep seeking. I suppose I am a feminist. I believe that it is important (for women) to be independent (Prue).

I need a time in the day when I have time just for myself, when I can choose how to spend it. It's a freedom. I can be who I am, nobody has any expectations of me....It's refreshing, filling up again, rest, relaxation. It's to do with giving out; you feel emptied, and it's time to top up again. I enjoy giving out, and I enjoy sharing myself with (others)....If I don't get those times of solitude, I feel ragged (Nadia).

Intellectual study, academic work, reading, thinking — that creates meaning for me. I do that for myself. That's where I have individual value and a unique contribution to make. Meaning in life is to me what I am doing outside having a role as a mother or worker, or something like that. Unless you are doing something, creating something new, you are not actually living (Sarah).

Affective.

The satisfactions are of being in control. For a long time I felt out of control as if my life was controlled by those around me....That has changed. I am now able to just take time for me and by taking time for me I can actually sort out my own issues, the things that I want to do, the places I want to go; so there's this feeling of control. The feeling that I can do it; that it is possible for me to achieve the things I want to do and to make choices as to whether I do it by myself or with help (Richard).

For many years I didn't enjoy (solitude). I used to feel guilty. Now I am coming to appreciate it. I intend to do it more....I feel rested, I have more energy, the clutter is cleared away. I have a clearer vision and more energy (Judith).

Feedback on the Effect of the Interview on Ideas about Meaning

I felt as if I had been given a gift. To be encouraged to look at my own personal interpretation of meaning of life (Elizabeth).

I was forced to examine my values, goals, satisfactions, etc. to an extent and depth greater than I have ever considered before (Rebecca).

It brought separate things into focus (by talking more about them) and made me look at each to see which were important, which ones I spent little time on, which ones I spent more time on. It made me re-prioritise some of the areas, so my life is a little more balanced (Richard).

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