

SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT, PURPOSE IN LIFE, AND TELEVISION  
VIEWING BEHAVIOR OF THE ELDERLY: A THEORETICAL  
AND EMPIRICAL INTEGRATION

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## PREFACE

Despite the centrality of television in the lives of older Americans, little is known about their television viewing habits. Utilizing the conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism, a theoretical model was developed and tested using a 53-item questionnaire that was distributed to members of the American Association for Retired Persons and patrons of the Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers located in a large metropolitan area in the southcentral United States.

The respondents revealed a uniformly high purpose in life and a heavy consumption of television programming. The model received relatively strong support. Regarding viewing preferences, most respondents lamented the loss of older programming that enforced the values of their age cohorts. Most also rejected what they perceive as a current permissive presentation of sexuality on television. Several recommendations were offered, particularly the formation of advocacy groups to advance the media needs of older Americans.

I wish to thank Dr. Godfrey Ellis, Dr. Frances Stromberg, Dr. Althea Wright, and Dr. Gene Acuff, the members of my dissertation committee. These professors have been my teachers, friends, and mentors from the beginning of this long effort. Most specifically, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Godfrey Ellis, whose guidance propelled this research from the outset. In addition to sharing his expertise, Dr. Ellis has been patient, caring, and has given unstintingly of his time to

a degree far exceeding his responsibilities as research advisor.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the problem

Society is currently undergoing the most dramatic demographic revolution in its history. In 1949, life expectancy in the United States was 49 years. By 1981, it had increased to 74 years. In 1980, approximately 11 percent of the population ranged from 65 to 100 years of age. Beginning with the year 2010, a formidable surge in the numbers of elderly people is expected as the post-war baby boom cohorts mature. One in every seven Americans will be over 65 years of age. Finally, by the year 2050, one-third of the population is expected to be elderly. In fact, the group over 85 years of age is projected to be the fastest growing segment of the population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983). The foregoing suggests that a whole new developmental stage may have been added to the life cycle of a large body of people.

Less is known about this segment of the population than any other because it is too new; elderly people have never before existed in such great numbers. Moreover, the elderly are highly individualistic. Although social scientists find it difficult to make generalizations about such a heterogeneous group, several conclusions seem warranted.

First, the elderly population is healthier than is usually assumed, although the very old (75 and over) are in greater need of assistance than the rest of the population. There is evidence that a substantial

improvement in the health of the elderly has taken place between 1961 and 1981. This is believed to be due to cohort effects and government health care programs such as Medicare and Medicaid (Palmore, 1986). Second, their educational level is well below that of the younger age group. This gap, however, is expected to be closed in the next 10 years (Barrow & Simon, 1979). Third, while most elderly report themselves to be well-adjusted and happy, mental problems are found among them in greater frequency than in younger groups. The aged, who represent only ten percent of the U.S. population, account for twenty-five percent of all suicides (Barrow & Simon, 1979). Health experts fear that the situation will worsen as the American population ages (Gottschalk, 1986). Fourth, and most relevant for the present research, is a factor known to be associated with suicide: social isolation. This characteristic will be discussed in more detail below.

As the years pass, the elderly person's family, friends, and neighbors may die. The elderly individual may not be physically mobile enough to make new social contacts. Lack of physical mobility is often accompanied by failing eyesight and hearing ability, all of which contribute to the social isolation of the older person. Physical mobility is also greatly related to the availability of transportation facilities.

Having a means of transportation helps the elderly person maintain the independence that Americans cherish. Transportation is needed for visiting family or friends, grocery shopping and travelling to health care facilities. Maintaining a car, however, is not always feasible for an older person; insurance rates rise after age 65, state driver examinations for licenses become more difficult to pass, and hearing and

visual acuity often decrease. Lack of transportation imposes serious restrictions on the lives of the elderly and contributes to social isolation. To accommodate this shrinking lifespace, older persons must turn to their proximal environments for information and stimulation (Birren, 1969). The chief object in the proximal environment serving this purpose is television.

One generalization that can be made with confidence is that older Americans, regardless of age, income, social status, health, education, or other factors affecting their life-situation, rely heavily on television viewing for information and entertainment (Cassata, 1965; Comstock, 1978, 1980; Cutler & Danowski, 1980; Davis, 1971, 1972; Davis, Edwards, Bartel, & Martin, 1976; Ngandu, 1979). The elderly devote more time to viewing television than to any other leisure activity (DeGrazia, 1961; Schalinski, 1968; Schramm, 1969; Zborowski, 1962). This is true despite the fact that television networks virtually ignore the elderly. Programming is geared towards the very young, whom the sponsors perceive as more important consumers (Kubey, 1980). Since television apparently plays such an important role in the lives of older Americans, it is important to learn as much as possible about their television viewing behavior. Such knowledge can enable television to better meet their needs in the future.

#### Need for Research

Television viewing behavior among the aging is a relatively new area of research. Only in the past few years has interest in the communication needs of the elderly shown growth. Nevertheless, research has been sparse. Moreover, it has been largely data-based rather than

theory- or model-based (Kubey, 1980). A few studies based on substitution theory have been the only exceptions to this generalization. The substitution hypothesis holds that older persons who suffer decrements in social interaction tend to use television as a substitute activity. Studies have generally not upheld the basic premise of substitution theory.

There is a need to expand the scope of theory-based research on the communication needs of older Americans. In this way, a body of information can be generated, which will facilitate maximum benefit from this potent, accessible, and relatively inexpensive means of communication.

#### Purpose of the Study

The present study presents a theoretically grounded examination of how concrete and subjective factors in the environment of the elderly impact on their television viewing behavior. Its purpose is to learn more about the television viewing behavior and viewing motives of older Americans. Such knowledge can shed more light on possible constructive uses of the medium by the older population. In addition, it could add a new and important dimension to gerontological research in general.

A second purpose of the study is an exploration of possible ways that television could improve the quality of life for these older viewers. It attempts to determine the entertainment content most preferred by this age cohort and to glean some expression from the respondents of their interest in informational and therapeutic assistance via the medium of television.

The present study is concerned with the question of how concrete and subjective factors in the environment of the elderly impact on television viewing behaviors. Situationalism constitutes the theoretical framework of the study. This theory holds that it is not the concrete situation individuals find themselves in, but their subjective definition of that situation that determines behavior.

Data was acquired by means of questionnaires distributed to members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and patrons of Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers. The concrete social situation was investigated by questions on the degree to which the individual engaged in interpersonal interaction.

The respondent's subjective definition of the situation was evaluated by questions from the Purpose in Life Test. This test measures the sense of meaning or purpose in life experienced by the individual. "Meaning," in this respect, refers to the ability to make sense of, or perceive a cohesion in, one's existence. "Purpose" refers to the perception of having a task to be done or a goal to be achieved (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987). This goal is of a spiritual or transcendental nature. The obverse of meaning and purpose in life is existential vacuum.

The impact of this sense of meaning and purpose in life on television viewing behavior was determined by examining several facets of the respondent's viewing behaviors. Questions were asked on whether television was viewed mainly for information content or mainly for companionship. For the purpose of this study, "companionship" was defined as viewing to alleviate loneliness and boredom, to fill in empty time, or to engage in parasocial interaction with media personalities.

Parasocial interaction is a relationship the viewer enters into with the television personality that simulates a face-to-face relationship with a real live person. The very lonely or isolated are more likely to engage in parasocial interaction with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Finally, the impact of motives for viewing on quantitative and qualitative viewing behaviors were investigated. The quantitative factor was measured by determining the hours per week devoted to television viewing. Qualitative factors were determined by the degree to which viewers assumed passive and dependent postures toward television programming and the degree to which they were selective in their viewing.

As mentioned earlier, a secondary objective of the study was to examine the degree to which the needs and preferences of older viewers were being met by the television networks, and to explore means by which the medium of television could serve to improve the quality of life for this aged cohort. This portion of the study was qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

Respondents were asked about their preferences in entertainment (which were assumed to differ from those of younger viewers). They were also asked about their degree of interest in several areas of informational services that could be rendered to them via the medium of television.

#### Overview of the Dissertation

The ensuing chapters expand upon the concepts briefly introduced here. In Chapter II, situationalism, the theoretical framework of the



study, is discussed in detail. The theoretical framework is then presented at three levels of abstraction. The first level is that of the conceptual framework. The second is the level of theoretical application. The third level of abstraction presents the specific propositions of the study. Presentation of each of these three levels of abstraction is accompanied by a review of related literature.

Chapter III, the methodology chapter, describes the operationalization and instrumentation of the study. This includes the development of the instrument, the collection of the data, and the statistical analysis. Chapter IV presents the findings of the quantitative study. It details a demographic profile of the sample, discloses frequency distributions of the variables under study, and examines the findings on the theoretical propositions using bivariate correlational analysis. Chapter V contains a summary of the findings, conclusions drawn from these findings, and a discussion of the limitations of the study. This is followed by a presentation of the secondary objective of the study. Results of the secondary objective are presented in the form of frequencies. Conclusions drawn from these frequencies are discussed as well. The final portion of Chapter V is devoted to recommendations for future research and a brief discussion of the need for advocacy on behalf of aged viewers.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

The latter half of the twentieth century has witnessed the convergence of two great social phenomena: 1) the proliferation of older retired persons in our society and 2) the emergence of television as the most powerful and pervasive of all communication media. There has been a strong affinity between these two phenomena that has not yet been substantially researched. In particular, there is a dearth of theory-based research on the role of television in the lives of the elderly.

The present study will endeavor to present such research. It will firstly examine some of the characteristics of the environment of the elderly. Further, it will consider how these are related to the purpose the elderly person feels he or she has in life, which, in turn, is related to the way the elderly person uses available resources, specifically, television. The relationships will be presented at three levels of abstraction. The first will be presented within the guiding context of the larger conceptual framework of symbolic interaction, or more specifically, what used to be called, "situationalism." The second level will be expressed at a somewhat lower level of abstraction, while still presenting the relationship at a fairly general level. The third, and final, level will present the same relationship at the level of testable hypotheses. Specific instrumentation and measurement will be

discussed in the next chapter.

Before presenting the three levels of abstraction, it might be helpful to briefly review the over-riding conceptual framework of the study. The following discussion will provide a brief overview of symbolic interaction theory.

### The Conceptual Framework of the Study

#### Symbolic Interaction

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, determinism was the dominant orientation of philosophers. At the close of the nineteenth century, however, some theorists took issue with the determinists' explanation of human behavior. They insisted that, unlike infrahuman species, human beings did not react passively to stimuli, but engaged in mental processes that intervened between the stimuli and resulting behaviors. This latter contention laid the groundwork for symbolic interaction theory. Basically, this theory differed from other theoretical perspectives of that time because it assumed that human behavior was influenced largely by cognitive activity rather than instincts, drives, and libidinal energy. Although the seeds of this concept were sown by a few philosophers earlier in history, a group of thinkers who emerged at the turn of the present century are considered the immediate predecessors of today's symbolic interactionists. Notable among these are William James, John Dewey, James Mark Baldwin, Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and William Isaac Thomas.

William James (1892/1981) attacked the strict determinist approach to the study of human behavior. He believed that the mind was an

important component of human behavior and stressed that the effects of instincts were modified by social learning. Other persons were therefore crucially important in forming the individual self. The "self" was described by James as consisting of four component selves.

He referred to the first of these component selves as a "social self," which was further fragmented into as many social selves as there were significant people in the individual's life. This was so because an individual generally showed a different self to different significant others. For example, a person may have presented one self to a small child and quite another self to club companions. The second self was the "material self," which consisted of the body, the clothes, the family, the home, personal property, etc. The third self, the "spiritual self" comprised the person's inner subjective being as opposed to the concrete elements of the self. The spiritual self was the most enduring and intimate part of the self. It included such elements as moral posture, matters of conscience, the ability to discriminate, etc. Within the parameters of the spiritual self, individuals identified themselves with thoughts rather than objects. These thoughts may have taken symbolic forms. Lastly, the fourth self was what James named "pure ego." This was the sense of being distinct from other humans. It provided a unifying quality to the over-all self.

There were self feelings and emotions connected with all of these selves such as pride, self esteem, arrogance, shame, etc. James described human beings as gregarious creatures who wished to be noticed and thought well of by others. Hence, a sizable portion of one's personality was seen by James as being rooted in interaction with others. This theme has been followed by virtually all later symbolic

interactionists.

James Mark Baldwin, who was influenced by James, contributed further to symbolic interaction theory by looking at the child's personality development in terms of learning. Baldwin described the child as moving through several recognizable stages: 1) learning to recognize oneself as being distinct from objects; 2) learning to imitate the behavior of others; 3) learning that there are feeling states associated with this behavior; and 4) associating these feeling states with conceptions of others, thus becoming aware that others have feelings as well. For Baldwin, personality development was in good part a product of social relationships (Baldwin, 1906).

John Dewey, a third philosopher, was also an educator and psychologist. Like James and Baldwin, he insisted that human beings were not passive reactors but grew and thought in a vast complex of interactions and relationships. Additionally, he proposed that it was linguistic communication that made this process possible (Dewey, 1922/1978).

The concepts advanced by these men were brought into the field of sociology by Charles Horton Cooley who contended that no society existed independently of individuals just as no individuals existed independently of society. Cooley (1909/1978) conceptualized the self as being developed through social interaction and having three components: 1) "the imagination of our appearance to the other person;" 2) "the imagination of the other persons's judgment of that appearance;" and 3) "some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification" (1909/1978, p. 169).

These symbolic interactionist concepts were subjected to systematic

treatment by George Herbert Mead in the 1930's. He described how infrahuman species, or species at the non-linguistic level, reacted directly to gestures in an instinctive fashion; whereas in the case of humans, gestures were symbols, which had to be mentally interpreted (hence, "symbolic" interaction). Individuals within a social group maintained a degree of consensus on such interpretations.

Like James, Mead maintained that human society was made up of individuals who had "selves" and made indications to themselves. Indeed, the concept of "self" became the hallmark of Mead's theory. Because the human being could respond to his or her own gestures, he or she could act toward self as well as toward others. For example, individuals could take pride in themselves, set goals for themselves, feel ashamed of themselves, etc. It was Mead's contention that this ability to act toward oneself was the principle mechanism with which human beings dealt with the world.

The self was formed through definitions made by others. At first, the child took the role of "significant others." Later, the child found it necessary to interact with, or take the roles of, several others simultaneously. This was accomplished by taking the role of the "generalized other," a composite of all the significant others in the child's life. This "generalized other" represented the standpoint of the group. Thus, the child became a member of society.

Mead conceptualized the "self" as being an on-going social process involving two phases, the "I" and the "me." An act is initiated by the "I" (the spontaneous, unorganized tendencies of the individual) and then mediated by the "me" (the representation of the generalized other and of society). The "I" and the "me" operate in a close, smooth collaboration

(Mead, 1934).

Mead described the mind, too, as a process. He conceptualized the mind as the process of social interaction. The mind is not a fixed entity in the human being, but rather, is a process that takes place when the individual is interacting with the self using symbols. Thought involves using symbols to call out in the self the response that others would make and then imaginatively completing hypothetical responses. Mind and self, then, are not seen as biologically given, but as social emergents (Mead, 1934).

Initially, symbolic interactionists focused only on linguistic symbols. Later, they dealt with other kinds of symbols such as the symbolism in clothing and physical settings (Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979; Goffman, 1974).

Symbolic interaction theory continues to be recognized as a major conceptual framework in the social sciences. As is true of most conceptual frameworks, however, it has undergone great changes, with various authors bringing new perspectives, new ideas, and new directions to the theory. One such change involved the merger of Mead's symbolic interactionism with a second framework that was originally a separate and distinct theoretical perspective known as "situationalism."

### Situationalism

The study of the environment as a causative factor in human behavior has had a long history. It came to be known as the, "situational approach." For the most part, early social scientists completely ignored the role of inborn traits and the effect of mental activity on behavior. Sociologists entered the picture in 1902 when

Cooley introduced his concept of the "self as a social product," the "looking-glass self," and "society and individuals as inseparable phases of a common whole" (Cooley, 1909/1978, pp. 107, 169).

W. I. Thomas, another early thinker, identified adjustive behavior as a central theme. He regarded behavior in a social situation as the central fact to be explained. Like the other early interactionists, Thomas rejected the main contention of the behaviorists that human action could be scientifically explained without reference to the minds of the actors. He pointed out that individuals do not always respond with similar behaviors to similar situations. This is due to the fact that an individual's subjective assessment of the situation intervenes between the objective situation and the responsive behavior.

In essence, Thomas considered it critical for any explanation of human behavior to catch the subjective interpretations in terms of which human beings react to external influences. Thus, although people in a society usually act in concert, they sometimes respond in individualistic manners. W. I. Thomas explained the process responsible for this as one's "definition of the situation" (Thomas, 1931/1978).

W. I. Thomas conducted a study of the Polish peasant using the situational approach but including internal subjective stimuli (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918). It was in this area, the definition of the situation, that Thomas made his greatest impact. However, in drawing attention to the subjective experience, he moved closer to the interactionist approach.

Situationalism, then, builds on Thomas's well known and classic dictum that if men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences (Thomas, 1923). This implies that the definition of



a situation influences the resulting behavior and therefore, the consequences of the situation. Hence, the subjective component, or definition of the situation, is an intervening variable in the relationship between objective conditions in the environment (the situation) and the adjustment process.

Individuals frequently enter situations in which their behavior becomes problematic because they do not have a routinized response in their repertoire of past experiences that is relevant to the situation at hand. Before they can act, they must somehow represent the situation to themselves in symbolic terms. To do so, the actors must invoke rules to give the situations meaning and give their actions purpose (i.e., define the situation). There are situations in which the environment is unresponsive and the actions are ineffective. Actors may not try to innovate if they presume that their actions will be unacceptable in the social context. In other instances, the reactions of others may partially validate or invalidate these definitions; they will then be revised as the basis for further action.

There may be cases in which the meanings and purposes of the individuals' situations remain unintelligible to them. As a result, they fail to make a definition of the situation and produce constructive behavioral responses. Such failure to define the situation and/or produce a suitable behavioral response results in a condition of anomia, a feeling of powerlessness, normlessness, and meaninglessness; a lack of purpose. Anomia represents the removal of conditions by which the actor presumes a shared common culture (McHugh, 1968). McHugh believed that the definition of the situation was difficult to observe without making large inferences. Significantly, he did not believe it could be

directly observed in such a process as aging (McHugh, 1968).

Thomas' situational approach shared with symbolic interaction essential assumptions, concepts, methodological predispositions and historical roots. Because of these similarities, Stryker (1964) believed that the situational approach could be completely subsumed under the concepts and assumptions of symbolic interaction theory. In a chapter of Christensen's (1964) Handbook of Marriage and the Family, Stryker presented the case so convincingly that in the 1980s few recall that the two theories were ever distinct approaches to the understanding of human behavior. For the purpose of the present investigation, the ideas of the original situationalism approach were considered to be of more value in gleaning an understanding of the phenomenon under study than were Mead and Cooley's ideas of the reflexive process and the "I" and the "me" dialectic that came from the more traditional symbolic interaction approach. Thus, the remainder of this study builds on the work of Thomas and others in restricting the theoretical base to the ideas coming from the situationalism side of symbolic interaction theory. An attempt will be made to study how older Americans' definitions of the situation impact on their use of a major object in their environment; the communication medium of television.

### The Three Levels of Abstraction

The theoretical ideas behind the present study will be presented three times at three different levels of abstraction. The first level of abstraction, or "Level I" will be presented at the level of the conceptual framework (identified above as situationalism). When presented at the second level of abstraction, or "Level II," the

material will be applied to the aged and their use of television. At the third and lowest level of abstraction ("Level III"), the material will be presented in the form of variables that can be empirically addressed. The first level of abstraction is presented below.

### Level I: The Conceptual Framework

The variables presented at the highest level of abstraction are shown in Figure 1 below. A discussion of these variables and their relationships will follow:

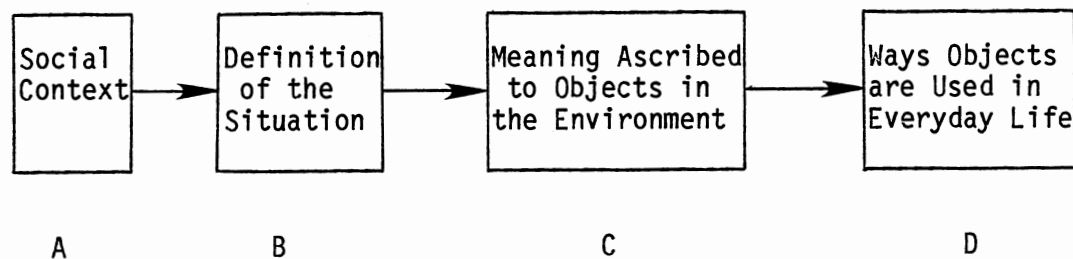


Figure 1. Propositions at Level I

Figure 1 presents the propositions posed in this study at the level of the conceptual framework. The "social context" (variable A) is the concrete environment in which an individual finds himself or herself. It can be conceptualized as consisting of an aggregate of norms, roles, reference groups, and statuses (Bengston, 1977). Social context is a dynamic rather than a static concept because it changes throughout life.

For example, at each juncture of the life cycle (transition from student to worker, to spouse, to parent, to the empty nest stage, to retirement, to widowhood, etc.) some roles become obsolete and some new roles are taken on. Each of these roles carries with it a set of norms, new reference groups, and new statuses. Symbolic interaction theory assumes that these are learned through interaction with others and internalized by the individual. This is, in essence, the process of socialization (Burr et al., 1979). The earlier stages of the life cycle most often involve expansion of the social context and the later stages are most often accompanied by shrinkage.

Changes in the social context of the very old present a good example of the process described above. These are generally the most difficult of all life cycle changes. Lost roles are, for the first time in the life cycle, not replaced by new roles. Opportunities for social contact with other people diminishes as well. Consequently, the aging individual experiences a dearth of social norms and reference groups to guide his or her behavior. The elderly person's status in society may change as well because younger members of industrialized nations may not perceive older members as making a contribution to society. The status of the elderly person may, therefore, be devalued (Atchley, 1980; Bengston, 1977; Dowd, 1975). This is a potent factor since, according to symbolic interaction theory, the self concept is derived from others' perceptions of oneself.

In order to readjust to the new social context, the individual must first make sense of the new situation and then form some sort of an attitude toward it. Variable B, then, is "definition of the situation." This symbolic interactionist term, discussed earlier, refers to the

cognitive, mentalistic process of visualizing and perceptively making some sort of evaluative judgment about the nature of the context of one's environment. When confronted with a changed situation or social context, the actor must invoke rules that give the situation meaning and give his/her actions a purpose. Definition of the situation, therefore, influences resulting behavior and the consequences of a situation. Definition of the situation, resulting in socially acceptable behavior and a future course of action, serves a normative function. When a definition of the situation cannot be made, nor a socially acceptable behavior or course of action ensue, the resulting behavior is anomic (McHugh, 1968).

The environment or situation of the individual includes objects. According to Mead, an object is anything in the environment of the individual that is extricated from its setting, held apart, and given meaning (Mead, 1934). Unlike a stimulus, which has a character of its own and acts on the individual, character and meaning are ascribed to the objects in the environment by the actor. Since objects are part of the individual's environment or situation, a new definition of the situation will require that new meanings be ascribed to the objects in the environment. Variable C, then, involves the meanings ascribed to objects in the environment.

The meanings ascribed to objects in the environment will, in turn, influence the ways in which objects can be used in everyday life (variable D). An object, according to Mead (1934), represents its own plan of action; e.g., a tablecloth is for eating upon, a chair is for sitting. Note that a tablecloth or chair can be used for a variety of other purposes. Once a meaning has been ascribed to an object in the

environment, a behavioral response to the object ensues and the individual begins to use the object in a manner consistent with the meaning that has been ascribed to it.

The process described above implies a movement that takes place among the four variables: variable A, the social context in which the individual finds himself, is the basis upon which variable B, the definition of the situation, is developed. As a result of that new definition, meanings ascribed to the objects in the environment (variable C), are formed. As a natural outgrowth of these ascribed meanings, a set of behaviors vis-a-vis the objects are developed. The ways the objects are used in everyday life (variable D) are consistent with the meanings that have been ascribed to them.

Perhaps an example will make this process more clear to the reader. One who feels insecure and frightened in a new social context might define the situation as dangerous. Consequently, in ascribing meaning to a handgun in one's possession, one might ascribe the meaning of "weapon of self defense." One might then use the handgun in ways that are consistent with that definition (sleep with it on the night stand or carry it in a shoulder holster). Another person might define the situation in the new social context as being safe and secure. This individual might then ascribe to the handgun, the meaning of "interesting historical ornament." He or she might then hang the handgun over the mantelpiece.

The social context, then, represents the concrete environment in which the individual lives. Symbolic interaction theory, however, assumes that human beings live in a symbolic rather than a concrete environment. The symbolic environment is the environment as the

individual perceives it. The internalization of this symbolic environment manifests itself as the definition of the situation. In a changed social context, the individual must make a new definition of the situation and ascribe new meanings to some of the objects in the environment. The objects are then used in accordance with the new meanings that have been given to them. Not all individuals will make the same definitions of similar situations, ascribe the same meanings to similar objects in their environments, or deal with these objects in similar manners. However, there do appear to be some consistent patterns. Without such regularities, of course, society would be impossible since "human society rests upon a basis of consensus; i.e., the sharing of meanings in the form of common understandings and expectations" (Meltzer, 1978, p. 17). It is this assumption that allows the kind of empirical investigation that is represented by the present study.

### Level II: Theoretical Application

The variables and relationships presented above at the level of the conceptual framework are now presented at a lower level of abstraction. The Level II variables are shown in Figure 2 and will be discussed below.

#### Perceived Social Isolation

The first variable (variable A: "social context" at the level of the conceptual framework) is now deduced to the next lower level of abstraction: the level of theoretical application. At that level

(Level II), it is presented as "perceived social isolation."

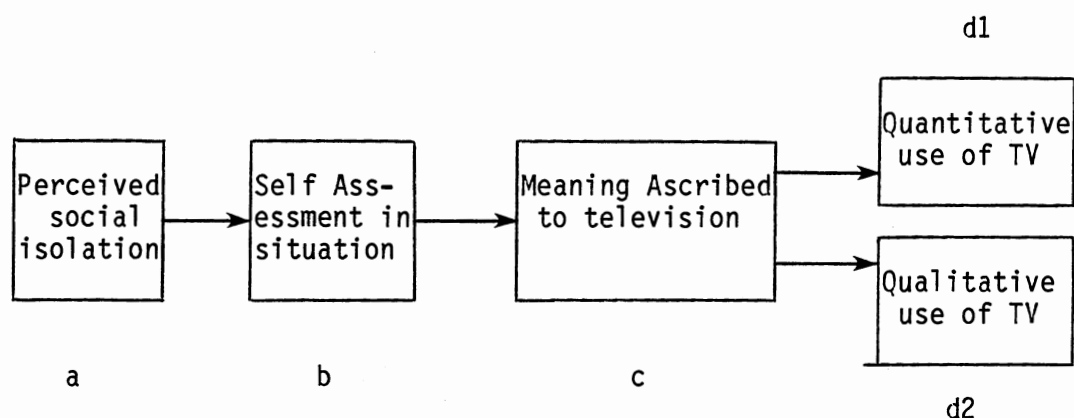


Figure 2. Propositions at Level II

The social context in which an individual lives may change many times over the course of the life cycle with each change being accommodated by a repetition of the process outlined in Level I. It is the shrinking spatial and temporal boundaries of old age, however, that bring about the most profound changes of all. Old age is often accompanied by loss of significant others in one's cohort group. Decrements in mobility, energy, eyesight, and hearing acuity may impede the acquisition of new social relationships. Retirement from the world of work, too, can sharply change the structure and social pattern in one's life. The many social contacts often made through the workplace may be lost when the role of worker is terminated.

Older Americans typically find themselves increasingly isolated from the younger segments of society as well. Although most younger people wish to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors toward the



elderly, they may have ambivalent feelings about aging. Growing old can be perceived as threatening to the basic values of a society in which youth and independence are so highly valued (Atchley, 1980; Butler, 1985). For most Americans who have not anticipated such a change, growing old represents a new social context. Often, the new social context in which aging people find themselves is one of perceived social isolation. According to the theoretical framework of this study, one's attitude toward oneself is formed through interacting with others. A social context of "perceived social isolation" (variable A) will therefore alter one's "self assessment in the situation" (variable B).

#### Self Assessment in the Situation

The Level I variable, "definition of the situation," then, is deduced to "self assessment in the situation" at Level II. Research on older people's subjective reactions to their narrowing life space and major role exits has yielded varied results. For example, old age has been associated with anomia and existential dilemma in much of the gerontological literature because roles in old age were limited and poorly defined, and social participation was greatly diminished (Rosow, 1973, 1974). Indeed, Blau (1981) stated that there are no prescribed roles for old age in most modern industrial societies. Due to this vacuum, older Americans are left with no choice but to subscribe to the norms of middle age. However, the major role exits of old age such as retirement and widowhood, plus failing health typically preclude attainment of middle age goals. Blau (1981) therefore referred to the role of older Americans as a "roleless role" and defined the problem of old age as an existential one for the individual and a social one for

society.

There has been some evidence in the literature to support Blau's (1981) contention. The working elderly, for example, consistently score higher on life satisfaction indices than the non-working elderly. It should be noted, however, that the working elderly in this survey, were generally younger than the retirees (Harris & Associates, 1975). Other studies have shown a direct relationship between amount of social interaction and subjective well being among older Americans. This was particularly true when there was opportunity to interact with people other than family members. However, perceived poor health of the individual or spouse, perceived inadequacy of income, and lack of mobility tended to weaken this relationship (Bull & Aucion, 1975; Graney, 1975b; Larson, 1978).

Mobility may, in many cases, be related to having a means of transportation. The availability of transportation facilities has appeared to make a major contribution to life space and morale among the very old. Those elderly who lacked a means of transportation, for example, have showed significantly lower life satisfaction than those who did not (Cutler, 1972, 1975; Graney, 1975b).

Anomia (a perception of normlessness on the part of the individual) is believed to result from impediments to social interaction, communication, and learning (McClosky & Schaar, 1965; McHugh, 1968). Such a phenomenon seemed relevant to the reduced social context of older Americans. Pope and Ferguson (1982), therefore, tested the popular belief that there was a positive relationship between age and anomia. Examining a sample of middle aged and elderly men, however, they found the older group of men to be no more anomic than the middle aged group

when the effects of education were controlled. Level of education may, therefore, influence the individual's existential status in later life. In addition, since most of this elderly sample was retired, these authors also concluded that work may not be as crucial to well being in old age as previously believed. In fact, other studies have demonstrated that retirement had a negative effect on adjustment only insofar as it inflicted felt economic deprivation on the retiree (Atchley, 1974; Bultena, 1969; Cutler, 1972; Thompson, Streib & Kosa, 1960).

In all studies, health was most closely related to morale in old age. Income, occupational status and education had a stronger effect on well being at the lower levels of these categories (Bultena, 1969). However, there has been a narrowing of the gap between social classes for ratings of happiness in recent years (Larson, 1978). The Harris survey found that there was a slight decline in subjective well being in persons over 60; but when diminished health, decreased financial resources, widowhood, loss of friends, and decreased activity were controlled, the relationship between age and subjective well being disappeared. Married persons tended to have higher well being scores with one exception: the "never marrieds" were roughly equivalent in scores to those of the "marrieds" (Harris & Associates, 1975).

Some gerontologists, therefore, reject the description of old age as a normless state. They believe that the perception of old age as a negative and problematic period of life is based on stereotypes of the needy and deprived. These researchers have reported seeing great diversity in life styles and modes of aging. They have observed that a large group of older Americans are physically and mentally active,

increasingly well educated, interested in learning, and capable of finding interesting uses of time (Atchley, 1974; Hellebrandt, 1980; Neugarten, 1979).

Indeed, several empirical studies have made the notion of old age as a globally negative period of life somewhat questionable. Offenbacher & Poster (1985), testing 120 non-housebound senior citizens in New York City, found that they did indeed adhere to the norms of middle age as Blau (1981) contended. They gave evidence of a baseline normative code of conduct to which they held themselves and their contemporaries: be active, sociable, and independent. Unlike younger years, this code did not include such aspirations as success, mastery and material wealth. Consequently, the code allowed broad guidelines for realistic social norms, goals, and structure to enhance self esteem, somewhat contradicting Blau's (1981) contention of a "roleless role" in later life.

An empirical investigation by Hunter, Linn, and Harris (1982) provided additional evidence of Offenbacher and Poster's (1985) conclusions but demonstrated that these social norms may be unattainable for some older Americans. Those elderly who were still able to control the decision making process in their own lives and perform the instrumental functions of daily living gave evidence of a perceived internal locus of control, which, in turn, was associated with high self esteem. However, those who had grown dependent and suffered loss of autonomy due to deteriorating health and/or institutionalization exhibited perceptions of external locus of control, which, in turn, was associated with significantly lowered self esteem.

Another group of researchers investigated the impact of

pre-retirement characteristics on the effects of retirement. Bengston (1977), for example, viewed behavior at each stage of the life cycle as resulting from interaction between the social system and the personal system. He believed that self assessment in each new situation consisted of two components: change and continuity. Change was inherent in the social, biological, and historical events (cohort effects) that took place over the life cycle. Continuity was rooted in the individual's historical style of adaptation to such changes (i.e., the individual's past capacity for forming a definition of the new situation, emerging with a suitable attitude toward it, and developing an appropriate course of behavior). Bengston's proposition that life-long propensities were an important component of the elderly individual's "self assessment in the situation" suggested that longitudinal studies might be more fruitful in examining this variable. In fact, three longitudinal studies, reported below, revealed that positive or negative affect in old age may indeed be partly a function of life-long personality characteristics.

Palmore, Fillenbaum, and George (1984) pointed out that studies showing decreased life satisfaction after retirement have been cross-sectional and have, therefore, failed to control for pre-retirement characteristics. In a longitudinal study that commenced prior to retirement and continued into the post-retirement years, they found that retirement had no effect on measures of anomia, locus of control, feelings of usefulness, or morale. This study further demonstrated that low social network involvement did not necessarily result in low morale, and high social network involvement did not necessarily result in high morale. The consequences of retirement were,

therefore, insignificant when pre-retirement characteristics were controlled.

Stones and Kozma (1986) applied the same principle to their study of the relationship between activity levels and happiness indices in old age. They tested the "Reactivity Model," which asserted that happiness was partially determined by activity levels, against the "Propensity Model," which asserted that both activity level and happiness indices were functions of underlying idiosyncratic propensities. The results of their study supported the Propensity Model in that both activity level and happiness scores remained stable over the two year period covered in this study while the relationship between happiness and activity level remained weak.

A third longitudinal study was conducted by Mussen, Honzik, and Eichorn (1982) who made use of data contained in "The Guidance Study," one of three longitudinal studies conducted at the Institute of Human Development of the University of California in Berkley. Their study, which spanned 40 years, demonstrated that individuals who were happy, emotionally stable, and of high ego strength as young adults, were most likely to be contented and well adjusted during their later years. Thus, all three of the longitudinal studies described above, supported Bengston's contention that self assessment in the new situation was a function of continuity as well as change.

Many studies have lent weight to the basic symbolic interactionist proposition that humans live in a symbolic rather than a concrete environment and, therefore, construct their own realities. They also support the thesis of the current study: that affect and behavior in old age are functions of the subjective definition of the situation

rather than the concrete situation. For example, evidence of association between concrete measures of social integration and positive affect in old age have been neither strong, conclusive, nor consistent (Bull & Aucion, 1975; Connor, Powers, & Bultena, 1979; Larson, 1978; Sherman, 1974). Other researchers have found that objective measures of social isolation produced little association with morale, while social isolation as measured by the respondents' subjective assessments of their situations were clearly related to morale in old age. These relationships became even stronger when the researchers controlled the effects of health and socioeconomic status (Liang, Dvorkin, Kahana, & Mazian, 1980; Larson, 1978; McClosky & Schaar, 1965; Palmore, et al. 1984.) Blau (1981) claimed that social participation became critical for morale only after widowhood or retirement. Low morale was the exception to the rule among people who maintained an active social life after these role exits.

In summary, there appeared to be no direct linear association between age and negative outcome. Moreover, studies reviewed above have not shown a consistent association between objective variables in the individual's social context and positive or negative affect at this stage of the life cycle. Most studies demonstrated that the relationship between "perceived social isolation" (variable A) and "self assessment in the situation" (variable B) was modified by many contingent variables, which included health, socioeconomic status, education, idiosyncratic factors, and life-long skills in adaptive behavior.

Perceived social isolation in later years will require a new self assessment in the situation. This subjective interpretation of the new

situation will influence the meanings ascribed to some of the objects in the environment. Among the most prominent and heavily used objects in older Americans' proximal environments are their television sets. Thus, a new situation of "perceived social isolation" (variable A) will require a new "self assessment in the situation (variable B), which will impact on the "meaning ascribed to television" (variable C) in the new situation.

### Meaning Ascribed to Television

At this lower level of abstraction, "meaning ascribed to objects in the environment" (variable C) is now deduced to "meaning ascribed to television" (variable c). Television appears to be one of the most important objects in the environments of most older Americans. Indeed, one statement that has been made with confidence is that, regardless of age, income, socioeconomic status, health, education, or other factors affecting their life situations, the elderly relied heavily on television viewing (Adams & Groen, 1974; Cassata, 1965; Comstock et al., 1978; Davis, 1971, 1972; Davis et al., 1976; Kubey, 1980; Moss & Lawton, 1982; Ngandu, 1979; Pfeiffer & Davis, 1971; Rubin & Rubin, 1981, 1982; Schalinski, 1968).

Although older people who lived in their own homes preferred participant activities, the largest portion of their time has been found to be devoted to solitary pursuits and spectator leisure activities, particularly television viewing (Atchley, 1980; Moss & Lawton, 1982). In fact, the elderly reported devoting more time to television viewing than any other leisure activity. Older people appeared to be television's largest viewing audience (Hoar, 1960; Rubin & Rubin, 1981;



Schramm, 1969; Sherman, 1974).

One of the reasons for this heavy viewing may be that television is the most preferred of all media sources for information and entertainment for older Americans. It is not only cheap and accessible, but it is more salient than any other medium, especially for those elderly who suffer decrements in hearing and vision. This is so because the two senses receiving stimuli can compensate for one another. Such an advantage is absent in other media, which require the use of only one sense. Moreover, television's heavy reliance on the visual sensory system facilitates the learning process, since the human brain is capable of storing large amounts of visual material (Tannenbaum, 1980). The elderly respondents in Adams and Groen's Canadian study (1974), reported that they were better able to remember information seen on television than information from radio or printed matter. Education, though, has been found to facilitate the ability of the elderly to learn from television (Hewlett, 1983). One empirical study of adults ranging from 18 to 70 years of age demonstrated that vocabulary skills rather than educational levels correlated positively and significantly with retention of television information for all age groups (Cavanaugh, 1983).

Schalinski (1968) found that his sample of residents in a Lutheran retirement home were both dependent on television and thankful for its availability. Davis (1975) has drawn a parallel between the dependent status of the aged and the preschoolers' similar viewing habits. He described both of these groups as being a dependent, captive audience for whom television offered both benefits and liabilities. Several of these are discussed below.

Studies of older people's viewing habits have suggested that television served multitudinous purposes for this age group. Prominent among these were stimulation and isolation reduction. Television may also have aided retirees in adaptation to changes in their lives when numerous ties were severed with retirement. Television filled some of the newly available time and served as a source of stimulation and information about the outside world (Comstock, 1980).

In fact, television appears to have offered a broad range of stimulation. Researchers have pointed out that television viewing is not entirely a passive activity but involves a variety of experiences providing means of escapism, amusement, fantasy, diversion, empathy, and identification, all of which have potential for evoking emotions at a vicarious level (Caughey, 1978; Comstock, 1980; Nordlund, 1978).

This concept may be highly relevant to the situations of older individuals, particularly those who live in a social context of increased isolation. Research on sensory deprivation has demonstrated that humans require input from the outside world in order to maintain normal functioning. When faced with a changed lifestyle offering reduced external stimuli, those with greater capacity to enrich their environment are better equipped to cope and adjust. The most commonly employed method of coping with lack of input from the outside world in Western society is probably television viewing. One of the reasons television is so eminently qualified to perform this function is that this medium has such a great capacity to elicit a wide range of human reactions. This may explain why emotionally arousing television entertainment is always the most popular (Caughey, 1980; Nordlund, 1978; Singer, 1980; Tannenbaum, 1980).

Scheff and Scheele (1980), testing Freud's belief that certain kinds of laughter are tension reducing, experimented on a group of subjects for physiological reactions to humorous films and tapes. They found that pulse rates lowered significantly immediately after exposure to enjoyable humorous fare. Moreover, viewers may also react to or interact with individual television personalities such as newscasters, game show hosts, fictional characters, and actors.

Caughey (1978) has pointed out that social organizations of all societies include interaction with people other than those with whom the members interact on a face to face basis. Many non-Western social systems include relationships even with non-human members such as thunder gods and deceased ancestors. These are usually an important part of the members' subjective experiences. He contended that this was also true of the American social system where the individuals interact extensively with people known to them only through the various media: politicians, athletes, newscasters, entertainers, and fictional characters of all sorts. Individuals take the role of, and become oriented toward, these artificial beings in a fashion that is similar to becoming oriented to persons in their actual social world. Because they are involved with these media beings on a regular and continuing basis, they develop lasting emotional orientations to them. Caughey (1978) further proposed that artificial beings as well as real persons are used as role models and for the process of anticipatory socialization (learning how to conduct one's self in situations one has not yet encountered). Since all Americans are familiar with a sizable number of artificial beings, these mutual acquaintances give strangers a basis for socializing. In this way, artificial relations and real relations

overlap. Such overlap has been observed among elderly viewers in several studies.

Davis (1971), for example, noted that television is used by the elderly as a basis for shared experience. Other researchers have found that television often becomes the subject of conversations and discussions among their elderly respondents, making it important even during non-viewing time. Television programs, particularly daytime serials, were used to facilitate interaction and discussion with others. Most often there were attempts to predict what would happen to the characters in the future. Daytime serials were particularly enjoyable for these elderly subjects because they offered long range involvement with the characters and the plot (Barton, 1977; Schalinski, 1968). Barton (1977) proposed that this type of programming compensated for diminished social networks and changed family structures that accompany old age. The elderly, especially women, were heavy viewers of daytime serials.

Using television for conversation topics was associated with heavy viewing. Contrary to expectations, some studies have found those who used television content for conversation topics to enjoy a greater amount of social interaction than those who did not (Barton, 1977; Compesi, 1980; Rubin & Rubin, 1982). These studies appear to have demonstrated that, in some situations, television may activate, rather than retard, the elderly person's contact with the real world. Television viewing and face to face communication appeared to be interrelated activities among the older Americans in these studies. Swank (1979), too, found that the more mobile and socially integrated members were more dependent on the media, rather than less, as

hypothesized. These subjects' possible use of media to enrich their interaction with others may have explained Swank's findings.

As described above, Caughey (1978) has suggested that television viewers may actually interact with "media beings." Instead of being entirely passive, then, television viewing could result in a variety of emotional experiences. Viewers may react to, or interact with, individual television personalities such as talk show hosts, actors, and fictional characters.

Horton and Wohl (1956) first explained this process of interaction between the viewer and the television personality. The performer simulates an intimate face to face conversation with the viewer. If the viewer responds reciprocally, even if only in the imagination, something in the nature of social interaction has taken place. Horton and Wohl proposed the term, "para-social interaction" for this phenomenon to differentiate it from actual face to face interaction. They believed that the aged and the more socially isolated may form such compensatory attachments to an extreme degree. Television programmers recognized this and encouraged para-social interaction between viewer and television image. Barton (1977) concluded that soap operas lend themselves particularly well to the behavior referred to as para-social interaction, especially among older people. This was so because, firstly, they regularly include older characters. Secondly, they emphasize personal, intense relationships on a day to day basis and have more time for full character development than other television productions. Thirdly, past research has suggested that drama is the most powerful form of television in its ability to influence a viewer's social behavior. Fourthly, the elderly, especially women, are heavy

viewers of soap operas.

Davis (1975) agreed that the elderly were more apt to engage in para-social interaction. He suggested that television provides safe, non-threatening companionship and that some elderly people experience fairly intense relationships with television characters. Performance styles of the television personality (newscaster, fictional character, talk show host), with the help of television technology and camera technique, create the illusion of addressing the individual viewer in a fashion both friendly and intimate, causing the viewer to feel that he or she knows the television personality personally (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Horton & Strauss, 1957). Television viewing, instead of being entirely passive, could then result in a variety of emotional experiences.

Ellis, Streeter, and Engelbrecht (1983), describing para-social interaction within the conceptual framework of symbolic interaction, expanded this concept somewhat. These authors suggested that viewers evaluate their own behavior from the perspective of television characters whom they choose as significant others from among the many television personalities they view. In selecting these "media others," they were influenced by the same criteria used for selecting significant others in the real face to face environment: salience, power, and affect. Because the viewer cognitively internalizes the "media other," the role-taking process could even occur in non-viewing contexts. Thus, the media other could affect behavior occurring outside the viewing contexts. Ellis et al. (1983) further contended that behavior could be learned by observing interaction that takes place between two or more significant others on the television screen by cyclically taking the role of one media other from the perspective of a second, and vice

versa. Thus, behavior could not only be influenced by media others, but new social skills could actually be acquired and generalized to real life situations through television viewing. This endows television with a pro-social function not usually attributed to it.

It is possible, too, that in choosing television personalities as significant others, the elderly may also select those with values that are similar to their own. In other cases, they may assign their own values to a favorite television personality. For example, Schalinski (1968) reported that Lawrence Welk was the number one favorite of his elderly sample. When asked why they regarded him so highly, they stated such reasons as: "He is a fine man," "It's a clean show," "He allows no drinkers on his program," and "He is conservative" (Schalinski, 1968, p. 65).

Nordlund (1978), too, believed that the viewers remain involved with certain television personalities even when away from the viewing situation, by thinking about them, discussing them with others, relating their circumstances to their own and becoming involved in their fate. He suggested that this involves elements of escapism, where involvement with real people is replaced by preoccupation with television personalities and characters. In an empirical study, he found that engagement in para-social interaction was positively correlated with hours of viewing, dependency on the media, neuroticism, and the tendency to resort to the media to combat loneliness. These findings suggested that para-social interaction was engaged in by the more socially isolated in lieu of interaction with real people.

Katz and Foulkes (1962), on the other hand, saw para-social

interaction as serving a constructive purpose for the elderly. They stated that, rather than identifying with a television personality or hero to the point where one is lost in fantasy unrelated to real life, the viewer engaged in para-social interaction plays opposite the television star. Much of the programming is aimed at the lonely and alienated viewers, offering companionship and inviting media interaction. Such programming could enhance real life ego for the elderly rather than retard it. These authors objected to the assumption that such programming is invariably dysfunctional for the individual and for society. Pointing out that alienation and loneliness are the same deprivations that lead to alcoholism and drug addiction, they not only asserted that the mass media offers a more legitimate and less hazardous escape route, but that they may also have positive functions.

Demarcation of time has been found to be another important function of television for the elderly. Formerly, the routine of work and family activities provided rhythm and structure to the days and weeks. In the older person's life, the days and the weeks can come to be organized around special programs. The rigid schedules of television may become important substitutes for the schedules that characterized pre-retirement life. For example, in an elderly person's unstructured day, he or she may plan to view a television show at 2:00 P.M. The day can now be marked off into events that occur before 2:00 P.M. and those that occur after 2:30 P.M. when the show is over. It is beneficial to be able to look forward to something happening at certain time. Many retirees have a need for some dimension of structure in their lives. Moreover, when these elderly people show a tendency toward rigidity and routinization, this tendency often finds focus on television (Atchley,



1980; Meyersohn, 1961; Schalinski, 1968).

Television viewing for information may play a strong role in alleviating feelings of stress resulting from the discontinuities of old age and the marginality of the older person's position in society. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) have written that dependency on the media for information is an omnipresent condition in industrialized societies. People depend on the media for a sense of connectedness to the world outside their immediate environments and for knowledge that enables them to act meaningfully and efficiently in the world. The need for fantasy and escape from daily problems and tensions are another source of dependency on the media. The more profound these needs, the greater the dependency and the greater the chance that information supplied will influence cognition, feelings, and behavior. There is more dependence when there is stress and change in society or when something unexpected has occurred. The media can reduce this stress by supplying information. One study by Peled and Katz (1974) lent some support to this logic.

Peled and Katz (1974) studied Israelis' television viewing habits at a time when that country was engaged in a war. Gripping tensions on television appear to have distracted Israeli viewers from reality-based tensions. Sixty to 79 percent of the respondents in this study indicated that news commentary was helpful in reducing tension during this period. The need for television programs to strengthen solidarity was negatively related to education and positively related to age. The authors interpreted this finding as an expression of marginality and a desire for vicarious participation. This elderly group wanted informational programs of all kinds. Peled and Katz (1974) drew a

parallel between the findings in this study and Americans' compulsive fixation on television after the assassination of President Kennedy. People wished to share their grief and participate vicariously. Television, on these occasions of crisis, served the need to know, the need for relief from tension, and the need for social connectedness; precisely the three uses the elderly population in the United States is believed to have for television in day to day life.

Television, then, has great importance and meaning in the lives of older Americans. Among its many functions, it may offer a wide range of emotional and intellectual stimulation, a sense of connectedness to the outside world, a means of promoting face to face social interaction, a means of structuring time, relief from tension in times of stress, and a means of help in adapting to changes brought about by retirement. Television, in fact, emerges as possibly the most important artifact in the culture of older Americans.

As described in Level I, the meaning ascribed to objects in the environment dictated the way these objects were used. There appeared to be two ways to consider the use of television by the elderly; one was in terms of quantitative aspects and the other was in terms of qualitative aspects. Thus, "ways in which objects are used" (variable D) will be deduced to two variables at this lower level of abstraction (Level II): "quantitative uses of television" (variable d1) and "qualitative uses of television" (variable d2).

#### Quantitative Uses of Television

The overall quantity of viewing was seen in this study as a critical variable for understanding the role of television in the lives

of older Americans. Quantity of viewing has risen steadily for the whole population since the introduction of television. Studies attempting to link environmental factors with quantity of viewing have not disclosed any general patterns. Lower levels of income and education have, in the past, been associated with heavy viewing, but this relationship largely disappeared by the end of the 1970s. This was so because those with lower education reached the maximum quantity of viewing while the more educated became less hostile to the medium and consequently increased their viewing time. Time devoted to viewing varied inversely with the number of people in the household for the general population (Comstock et al., 1978). But, contrary to expectations, Davis (1972) found that, in his sample of older Americans, there was a positive relationship between the number of people in the household and time devoted to television viewing. Viewing, for these older people, therefore, appeared to be a shared experience. Anderson's (1984) sample of elderly shut-ins who lived alone did not view more or less than samples of more mobile elderly.

Under normal circumstances, large amounts of television viewing have been found to decrease involvement in other activities only when it is a novelty, but not later on (Comstock et al., 1978). Females view more than males in all age categories (Comstock, 1978). Blacks view more than Whites, but reverse a trend in that the Black elderly view somewhat less than younger Blacks (Comstock, 1980; Comstock et al., 1978; Davis, 1972; Young, 1979).

In addition, accurate information on the quantity of television viewing has been difficult to glean. Davis (1975), for example, conducted a survey of extant studies and found that elderly subjects'

self-reports greatly underestimated their daily number of viewing hours. The Neilson figures for the elderly population were found to be six times higher than the self-reports. Self-reports of content and program preferences appear to be more reliable. Davis et al. (1976) compared the three methods of measuring quantity of viewing for older subjects: self-reports, observations, and monitoring by electronic devices. The latter two methods demonstrated viewing hours among these elderly viewers that were five times as high as their self-reports. Content and statements of program preferences were more reliable.

Electronically monitored estimates of quantity of viewing for the general population may have over estimated actual viewing time, because family members did other things and were in and out of the room. However, this was not true for the elderly, most of whom lived alone and attended the set when it was on. Similar recorded viewing hours for the elderly, therefore, were believed to reflect a greater quantity of viewing than for other age groups (Anderson, 1984; Hopkins & Mullis, 1986).

Quantity of viewing is an important component of a group's viewing behavior. Equally important is the content or quality of the viewing.

### Qualitative Uses of Television

This implies an interest in the mechanism for choice and the extent of discrimination exercised in that choice. The "qualitative uses of television" (variable d2), therefore, is a second crucial variable for the investigation of television viewing behavior.

Communication researchers and those interested in the qualitative aspects of television have long been aware of certain contradictions in

the postures of members of the viewing audience towards television's offerings. For example, audiences have regularly decried the baseness of television's offerings. Nevertheless, it has often been the most trite and trivial shows that attracted the largest audiences. What is more, surprisingly little differences in viewing behaviors and program choices have been found among individuals of varying educational and socioeconomic levels (Comstock et al., 1978). Favorable opinions of television have been found to be inversely related to socioeconomic status and positively related to age (Comstock et al., 1978; Doolittle, 1979). The actual viewing behavior of those who deplored television's offerings and those who did not, was remarkably similar (Comstock et al., 1978).

Weibe (1970) pointed out that such paradoxical behavior toward the media predated even the printing press. For example, while wandering minstrels of earlier centuries were taunted by audiences for the low quality of their offerings, it was only the most trite and vulgar entertainment that attracted the largest audiences to the wandering minstrels. The printing press, in the beginning, was required largely to satisfy the taste of mass audiences by furnishing low caliber content amid strong criticisms coming from the very consumers of this content (Weibe, 1970). Because the taste for trivial entertainment has been so pervasive and so consistent over time, Wiebe concluded that it served some psychological need for humans. He speculated that light media fare offered an easy and simple substitute for mature interaction with the real live "other."

Comstock et al. (1978) claimed that much television was watched by the population in general for the purpose of watching television, rather

than for the purpose of watching a particular program. In other words, viewers first decided whether to view and secondly what to view. Once viewers had decided to view, they were selective about which programs to choose.

Thus, at Level II, a change in the person's social context to a condition of "perceived social isolation" (variable a) caused the individual to form a new definition of the situation that included a new "self-assessment in the situation" (variable b). The new self-assessment in the situation was expected to influence the "meaning ascribed to television" (variable c). This meaning, in turn, was expected to determine how television was used, the "quantitative uses of television" (variable d1) and the qualitative uses of television (variable d2).

### Level III: Specific Propositions

The variables presented above at the level of the conceptual framework and the level of applied theory are now presented at the lowest level of abstraction: that of specific content propositions. The Level III variables are shown in Figure 3 and are discussed below.

This study is concerned with two aspects of older peoples' social contexts. One is involvement in activities such as church and organizational activities. The second is involvement in interpersonal interaction. Therefore, "perception of a condition of social isolation" (variable a) is deduced at Level III to two variables: "involvement in activities" (variables a'1) and "involvement in interpersonal interaction" (variable a'2).

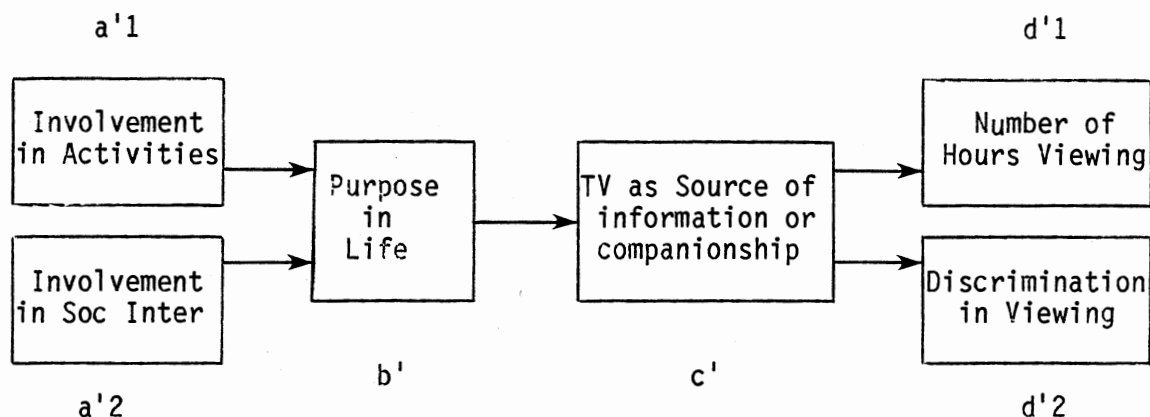


Figure 3. Propositions at Level III

### Involvement in Activities

The barriers to social activities and social interaction that can arise in old age have been discussed at Level II. Church attendance in old age may serve as an illustration of how all the barriers to social interaction combine to exacerbate the isolation of elderly people. Religion has a great capacity to help older people overcome grief and cope with loneliness and unhappiness. Moreover, belief in the importance of religion is held by a larger proportion of the people over sixty-five than any other age group. Bible reading, praying and meditation steadily increases with age during the adult years. Yet, despite these facts, the rate of church attendance declines during the late sixties and early seventies (Moberg, 1977; Atchley, 1980).

There may be several reasons for this apparent paradox. The elderly often sense the ambivalence felt toward them by younger people. They may feel that they are no longer respected for their experience and knowledge and may perceive themselves to be excluded or ignored by younger members of the church. Some elderly may opt not to participate in church activities if their shrinking financial resources prohibit them from making significant contributions or from dressing well. Physical limitations and transportation considerations may add to the difficulty of participating in services and activities at the church. Therefore, although the church's resources for meeting the needs of the elderly are great, many factors in the older person's social context may combine to bring about decreased participation.

Activities in voluntary organizations, such as job related and civic groups, were generally found to reach a peak in middle age and decline thereafter. As people aged, they were found to become less likely to join organizations (Babchuk & Booth, 1969; Bengston, 1977). Recent decades, however, have given rise to a new category of organizational activity; many retirees are simply reorienting their associational activities to their changing age status (Trela & Simons, 1971). Areas where social activities have increased significantly among those over 65 have been the community recreational centers, particularly senior citizen centers. Not only was attendance at these centers on the rise, but there was evidence of even greater interest in them in the future. According to one survey, attendance at senior centers rose from 22 percent of all older Americans in the country in 1974 to 27 percent in 1981. Additionally, some 35 percent of those not attending attested that they would like to. Blacks showed a greater interest than Whites,



with 43 percent of those over 55 years who were not now attending, claiming that they would like to. Attendance was heaviest among those over 70 years of age (Harris & Associates, 1981). Health and distance from the center were related to frequency of attendance (Tuckman, 1967). Two other areas of increasing activity for older Americans were volunteer work and educational enrollment. Engagement in both those activities was more prevalent among college graduates. In the seven years between 1974 and 1981, the number of older Americans enrolled in courses in schools, places of business, and community and senior centers rose from two percent to five percent of all older Americans in the country (Harris & Associates, 1975, 1981).

Living arrangements of older Americans may also influence the level of engagement in social activities. Sherman (1974), who tested residents of retirement housing, found that the level of engagement in social activities by those living in retirement housing was considerably higher than that of the control group who lived in conventional dispersed housing. Two years later, the activity levels of those living in retirement housing had increased while activity levels for the controls had decreased. The differences in social activity level, however, had only a moderate effect on the individual's outlook on life.

Several other studies, mostly longitudinal, have examined the relationship between retirement and participation in social activities, including organizations and senior centers. Uniformly, they demonstrated that the degree of involvement in such activities and preferences for categories of leisure activities appeared to have continuity over the life cycle and did not change with retirement. Retirement had no effect on either organizational activity or overall

activity measures. The new senior centers and other organizations for the retired attracted those elderly who were already inclined to be socially active (Bosse & Ekerdt, 1981; Palmore, Fillenbaum, & George, 1984; Schnieder, Chapman, & Voth, 1985; Storey, 1962).

Involvement in organizational activities (variable a'1) represents one form of social interaction. Another variable of interest to the present study was "involvement in interpersonal interaction" (variable a'2).

### Involvement in Interpersonal Interaction

The extent to which elderly involve themselves in interpersonal interaction is a variable condition. Some elderly attest to strong familial and friendship networks, while others perceive a profound isolation. When a sample of elderly Toronto residents was asked to identify "the one most important problem that senior citizens face in life," 34 percent of the entire sample answered "loneliness and the need for companionship." This response came largely from females but was constant across all categories of age, income, living arrangements, and levels of social activity (Adams & Groen, 1974). In the United States, loneliness has been reported to be a serious problem for 10 percent of those over 65. It was ranked fourth among 12 areas representing serious problems for the elderly and was preceded only by poor health, financial difficulties, and fear of crime (Harris & Associates, 1981).

Greater loneliness was associated with having less contact with friends, having fewer close friends, social anxiety, ineffectiveness in influencing others, low marital satisfaction, low life satisfaction, and low level of religiosity. Those elderly who lived with relatives were

more lonely than those who lived alone; interaction with friends seemed to be a more effective way of combatting loneliness than interaction with children. Loneliness was further linked with poor hearing ability, poor health, and having a lower income. Additionally, it was correlated with feelings of restlessness, boredom, and anger (Perlman, 1978).

Friendship is a principal contributor to subjective well being as people age. It appears that the quality of such interaction is more important than the quantity. Researchers have found that it is mainly the degree of intimacy and caring inherent in the interaction that impacts on morale at this stage of life (Cohen & Rajowski, 1982; Connor, Powers, & Bultena, 1979). Close friendships are of greatest value after role loss, apparently performing a "shock-absorbing" function. The elderly appear to need friendships at three levels: casual, more intimate and as confidants (Birren, 1969; Blau, 1981).

The contribution of having a confidant to provide positive affect and morale in old age has been of interest to researchers in the past decade. The term, "confidant" implies a great degree of intimacy and reciprocity. With the exception of one study (Keith, Hill, Goudy, & Powers, 1984), it was generally found that a strong, positive relationship existed between the two variables of presence of a confidant and morale in old age. In a study by Strain & Chappel (1982), having a confidant emerged as the strongest single predictor of life satisfaction in a sample of elderly people. Moreover, the number of confidants a respondent could attest to varied positively with life satisfaction scores. Women were more likely to report having a confidant than men. Married men were more likely to report their wives as confidants while wives were more likely to identify confidants other

than their husbands. Harrison (1983) reported that those wives who identified their husbands as confidants scored highest in morale. Men tended to rely solely on their spouses for intimacy (Blau, 1981; Strain & Chappell, 1982). Having a confidant reduced or eliminated the relationship between widowhood and lower feelings of well-being (Arling, 1976; Lowenthal & Haven, 1968). Ward, Sherman, and LaGory (1984), studying 1,185 older Americans, found that morale was highest for those who saw confidants daily; lowest for those who saw confidants less than weekly.

It may be, however, that having a confidant is not universally essential to well being in old age. Maddes (1985) found that, among older women who did not have confidants, those who testified to wanting them scored low on subjective well-being while those who professed to not wanting confidants scored as high as the women who had confidant relationships.

The impact of retirement on participation in organizational activities has been discussed above. However, retirement also affects opportunities for interaction with friends. Work provides personal independence, status, and a source of identification since workers are most often members of social groups. The camaraderie offered by the work group is almost always a source of satisfaction in daily life. It has been estimated that the American worker has more acquaintances through the job than from any other source. Work also provides the worker with a purpose in life and structures his or her time. According to Goodstein (1962), retirement offers none of these assets. The retiree is often seen as a person without a role and without purpose in life. Blau (1981) pointed out that, since most friendships are role

contingent in industrialized societies, elderly retirees, divested of their earlier roles, may find a sharp discontinuity in social situations. As explained earlier, a lack of opportunity for interaction makes it extremely difficult for one to make a definition of a new social context and find meaning and purpose in one's life.

### Purpose In Life

The degree to which persons esteem or value themselves in this new social context can be studied more concretely as the degree to which they perceive that there is some purpose or meaning in day to day existence. Therefore, the more general variable, "self-assessment in the situation" (variable b) at Level II is now deduced to a more specific and testable concept at Level III: the sense of meaning or "purpose in life" (variable b').

According to Viktor Frankl, the primary motivation in life was the striving to find meaning in one's existence. Although Frankl was a former student of Freud, he departed from the premise that humans are primarily motivated by the biological "will to pleasure." Instead, Frankl believed that the primary motivation in life was an intellectual and spiritual striving to give life meaning by actualizing as many values as possible. Happiness and pleasure were not considered values in Frankl's philosophy but a by-product of the attainment of other values. Conscience was the basic value that made up the intrinsic, spiritual natures of human beings that separated them from lower species of life (Frankl, 1978b).

Like the symbolic interactionists, then, Frankl considered that reductionism was subhumanism. The human dimension, or what Frankl

called the "noological dimension" (Frankl, 1984) was more encompassing and included cognitive, mentalistic, and spiritual components.

Frankl saw suffering as an omnipresent component of human existence and believed that the will to overcome or cope with suffering provided meaning and purpose in life. He emphasized that humans were not always free from the concrete situations that arose in their lives. They were free, however, to define these situations and form attitudes in regard to them that enabled them to cope successfully. Humans could, according to Frankl, cope with any life situation if they could understand the meaning or the "why" of it. The ability to find meaning and purpose in one's life, existed in even the most adverse conditions. Coping with one's life situation was each individual's responsibility, and this responsibility was seen by Frankl as the very essence of human existence. It was this assumption of responsibility that gave humans a purpose in life (Frankl, 1955, 1966, 1967, 1978a, 1978b, 1984; Weisskopf-Joelson, 1955, 1958). This responsibility was different for each individual and varied with the ever-changing concrete situation of each individual. The ability to overcome suffering, to maintain the ethical values that exist only at the human level, and to shoulder day to day burdens and responsibilities gave human life meaning and purpose (Frankl, 1984; Polak, 1949).

One who cannot find this thread of meaning, or purpose in life, suffers what Frankl called, "existential vacuum" (Frankl, 1984). This refers to the loss of feeling that life is meaningful; existence is considered boring with little motivation to struggle to overcome obstacles, and no organized frame of reference from which to perceive meaning. Existential vacuum was considered by Frankl to be a human

condition rather than an illness, and boredom is its main symptom. The individual drifts along in search of diversion and hedonistic pleasure to ease the tensions (Frankl, 1955, 1966, 1978a, 1984; Weisskopf-Joelson, 1955, 1958). Thus, Frankl's existential vacuum stems from spiritual and existential difficulties rather than ego/superego conflicts.

Modern psychotherapy has been confronted with an increasing number of complaints centering on this feeling of emptiness that Frankl has labeled, "existential vacuum" (Frankl, 1967; Garfield, 1973). Frankl believes that this is so because of the nature of modern society. Unlike other animals, humans are no longer told by drives and instincts what they must do; nor do they have to use their survival skills. Moreover, tradition structures human behavior to a far lesser degree than in the past. Frankl believes that the crumbling traditions of modern times are a cause of existential vacuum. Affluence may be another cause, because what humans need is not homeostasis but the striving for a desired and worthwhile goal. If a person is not challenged by any tasks to complete, the resulting lack of tension may result in existential vacuum (Frankl, 1967, 1978a).

An essential ingredient of human beings' spiritual selves was what Frankl referred to as "self-transcendence." He defined this as being directed to someone or something other than oneself; to a meaning to fulfill, to a task to be done, to a person to love, to a cause to serve, to the appreciation of beauty, or to suffering to be endured (Frankl, 1975b). This quality, according to Frankl, enabled life to have meaning until the very last breath.

Persons who are totally pragmatic and materialistic in their

outlook on life are more prone to the existential crisis described by Frankl. Their relationships with other people are generally made on what Maddi (1967) termed, "contractual grounds" rather than on the grounds of tradition or intimacy. Such persons tend to look upon relationships as serving some social end or biological need. Contractual relationships are devoid of intimacy, commitment, or spontaneity (Frankl, 1967; Maddi, 1967).

Frankl often used Tolstoy's novella, "The Death of Ivan Illych" to illustrate this philosophy. Ivan Illych had maintained a totally materialistic and pragmatic outlook on life. By studiously applying this outlook, he had risen to become an important public official. Throughout his life, all of his relationships and even his marriage had been based on expediency to the exclusion of any genuine or intimate relationships. As he lay dying, he became acutely aware that family members and friends paid him perfunctory and superficial attention. He meant little to them or they to him. His impending death precipitated an existential crisis. He became tormented by the lack of meaning in his life and uttered the often quoted words:

"Maybe I did not live as I ought to have done. But how can that be when I have done everything properly?" (Tolstoy, 1898/1960, p. 148).

Ivan Illych had indeed done everything properly in ministering exclusively to what James (1880-1890/1981) referred to as the "material self." His existential crisis was due to the total neglect of the "spiritual self." Eventually, Ivan Illych became aware of the suffering his wretchedness and anger were inflicting on his wife and his frightened little boy and, henceforth, devoted himself to making his last hours easier for them. As a result, he found peace, the ability to



cope with his physical and mental suffering, and the ability to face his imminent death. Thus, by transcending himself, Ivan Illych found a purpose in life in his last hours and was able to rise above his suffering.

Crumbaugh and Maholick (1963) devised the "Purpose in Life Test," which made it possible to study empirically Viktor Frankl's concept of existential vacuum. This instrument will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. At this point, however, it is relevant to note that Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964, 1969), using the Purpose in Life Test, identified Frankl's existential vacuum as a unique syndrome unrelated to any other emotional dysfunction. Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964, 1969; Crumbaugh, 1968). Crumbaugh (1968) did find that purpose in life scores correlated with scores on the Depression Scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the Srole Anomie Scale, and the Elmore Anomie Scale. Varna Garis (1977) found a very strong inverse relationship between the Purpose in Life Test and the Beck Depression Inventory as well. Frankl (1978), however believed that depression and existential vacuum were not the same syndrome, although depression could have resulted from a state of existential vacuum. He wrote:

The person suffering from endogenous depression is sometimes associated with hypertrophy of meaning -- but the patient's blindness to meaning in life is not the cause of his depression, but its symptom; i.e., the patient suffering from endogenous depression is prevented by his psychosis from seeing any meaning in life, whereas the person suffering from neurotic depression may have become depressed because he could not see a meaning in his life (Frankl, 1978, p. 61).

Crumbaugh and Maholick (1977) agreed, stating that lack of meaning or purpose in life was probably a more generic term than depression.

...both lack of purpose and depression can result from other causes. Depression, for example, could be due to an abundance of meaningful ends, but a deficiency in techniques of acquiring meaning ends, while lack of meaning and purpose may be present in a rathymic (far from depressed) personality who drifts aimlessly because of a lack of organization in life experience.... Lack of purpose is probably a more generic term than depression, for the latter represents a relatively specific and inadequate technique of adjustment to conflict. Loss of meaning or purpose may follow failure of any adjustment technique (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1967, pp. 193-194).

The relationship between purpose in life and anomia also appears to be highly questionable. Anomia has been defined as, "a personal psychological state in which the individual's sense of social cohesion is severely diminished or destroyed. It is a manifestation, on an individual level, of the societal state known as anomie" (Garfield, 1973, p. 397). While Crumbaugh and Maholick conceded that there may have been some overlap between the two concepts, they insisted that lack of meaning and anomia were separate syndromes (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Crumbaugh, 1968).

Garfield (1973) compared two anomia scales with purpose in life in a large sample containing five subgroups of the population, ranging from ghetto residents to professionals. These scales were: 1) the Srole Anomia Scale, which purported to measure anomia defined as a deficit in the individual's sense of social integration or "self to others" alienation (Garfield, 1973, p. 398) and 2) the McClosky-Schaar Anomia Scale, which identified anomia as "a sign of the failure of socialization and of the means by which socialization is achieved" (McClosky & Schaar, 1965, p. 39). Scores on the two anomia scales were highly correlated with each other, but neither correlated with the Purpose in Life Test.

In addition, studies done to date have not demonstrated any association between purpose in life and personality characteristics. Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) and Crumbaugh (1968) found no relationships between any personality measures on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and purpose in life scores, with the dubious exception of the Depression Scale and the Anomia Scale described above. Later, Crumbaugh, Raphael and Schrader (1970) administered the Purpose in Life Test plus a battery of personality tests to trainee Sisters in a congregation of Dominican Sisters. Purpose in life scores were significantly and positively correlated with ratings of success in training. The relationship of purpose in life scores to personality measures was only low to moderate.

Several studies comparing purpose in life scores with individuals' values added further weight to Frankl's model. Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) found no relationship between purpose in life and six values assessed by the Allport Vernon Lindsey Scale of Values. More recent studies have examined the relationships among purpose in life and a broader range of values.

When compared with the full scale of the Rokeach Value Survey, for example, purpose in life was significantly correlated only with the value of searching for salvation. The value of emphasis on salvation and de-emphasis on the values of pleasure, cheerfulness, and being broad-minded was associated with a concern for responsibility and self-control; thus lending further support to Frankl's theory (Crandall & Rasmussen, 1975; Simmons, 1980).

High purpose in life was also positively associated with intrinsic religious orientations, defined as a personal commitment to religious

values or "living one's religion" (Crandall & Rasmussen, 1975, p. 484) as opposed to using religion for the purpose of expediency. Conversely, low purpose in life was associated with extrinsic religious orientations that were concerned mainly with instrumental values of religion such as social acceptance. In a similar study on a sample of rural elderly with above average education, intrinsic religious orientation was found to bear no relationship to health, happiness, anxiety about life or psychic well being. It was however, strongly related to the individual's perceived purpose in life. It was the self transcendent quality of the religiosity of these individuals that provided meaning and purpose in life (Tellis-Nyack, 1982).

Simmons (1980) further explored the relationship of purpose in life scores to personal values using two measures of valuing competence; an additional measure of valuing fulfillment and the full compliment of the Rokeach Value Survey. Purpose in life scores were found to be positively related to present satisfaction and future aspirations but independent of the quality of the person's past living experience. It was also positively associated with competence in making value judgments on self evaluation, or what was important about being a person, but not necessarily about what was worthwhile in the environment. High purpose in life scores were likewise associated with an emphasis on satisfaction and a de-emphasis on the value of pleasure.

Significantly, Harrison (1983) found a high purpose in life to be associated with having a clear idea of what was worthwhile in life. Further testimony to the uniqueness of the purpose in life concept was rendered when no relationships were found between the Purpose in Life Test and instruments measuring life satisfaction, locus of control or

will to live in elderly samples (Harrison, 1983; Varna Garis, 1977).

Arafat, Acuff, and Allen (1973) examined existential vacuum in Jordan at a time when civil war was imminent and political unrest was high. War has been known to create a societal state of anomie. The test was administered to six subgroups of the population; army officers, businessmen, professionals, laborers, students, and teachers. Significantly, army officers and teachers scored the highest on purpose in life, a manifestation of commitment to goals in the current situation.

The empirical studies described above have consistently supported Frankl's concept of finding meaning in life through values and responsibility. Frankl's concept of existential vacuum appears to be highly relevant to the lives of older Americans. The aged persons in modern industrial societies are rarely valued as mentors, since their skills and experience are most often obsolete (Dowd, 1975). Their frame of reference from which to perceive meaning may be lacking as well because there are no prescribed roles for the elderly (Frankl, 1967, 1978b).

Acuff and his colleagues (Acuff & Allen, 1970; Acuff & Gorman, 1968) were the first to apply the concept of meaning and the "Purpose in Life Test" to the study of social gerontology. They suggested that the process of aging might increase vulnerability to existential vacuum. According to these researchers, changes in lifestyle mandated by retirement, loss of loved ones, and possible decline of physical and mental abilities may bring about loss or modification of the sense of meaning and purpose in life that formerly sustained the aging person. Their findings in two studies of retired university professors strongly

supported Frankl's theory. Those who were bereaved, who did not look to the future, or who had low religious orientation, scored significantly lower on the Purpose in Life Test than the other subjects in these studies. Additionally, those who were more oriented to the nuclear family scored lower than those who were more oriented to the extended family.

Frankl, too, believed that the psychological crises of retirement could have been another cause of existential vacuum. To date, studies have not supported this opinion. In Acuff and Gorman's (1968) study of emeritus professors, those with greater religious orientations scored higher in purpose in life regardless of degree of professional involvement. This finding was corroborated by Laufer, Laufer, and Laufer (1981) who measured the association of purpose in life with underlying occupational interests and aspirations in a sheltered gerontological workshop. Their expectation was that expressions of vocational interests and aspirations would be closely associated with an individual's sense of meaning or purpose in life. On the contrary, no relationship between the two were found. These researchers concluded that the concept of purpose in life possibly measured something more global than work aspirations and interests. One might speculate that these results paralleled the situation of Ivan Illych, who single-mindedly ministered to his material self throughout his life. They also support Frankl's assertion that it is the spiritual self rather than the filling of material needs that furnishes meaning and purpose in life.

In summary, then, Frankl believed that the primary motivation in life was an intellectual and spiritual striving to find meaning and

purpose in one's existence. He called this concept, "purpose in life." One who could not find this meaning or purpose in life suffered existential vacuum (Frankl, 1984), which was manifested chiefly in boredom and a quest for hedonistic pleasure to ease the tension.

An instrument created by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1969) has successfully isolated the construct, "purpose in life" and identified it as a unique, unidimensional condition unrelated to other values or personality characteristics. In subsequent studies, purpose in life has been found to consistently correlate with the more spiritual aspects of human nature while showing no association with more material or hedonistic aspirations. All studies to date have appeared to support Frankl's theory that purpose in life is a unique and basic human drive, associated with the cognitive and spiritual natures of human beings.

If, for the reasons described above, older individuals find themselves experiencing existential vacuum, they may, as Frankl (1984) and Weisskopf-Joelson (1958) have described, drift along in search of diversion to combat the boredom and ease the tension. The present study contends that such diversion is most readily available to the older person in the form of television. Hence, the older person's definition of the situation or the degree to which a purpose in life is perceived, will influence the meaning ascribed to objects in the proximal environment and the ways they are used. Specifically, it will influence a perception of television as a source of information or as a source of companionship, and the individual's subsequent viewing habits.

#### Television for Information or Companionship

"Meaning ascribed to television" (variable c) at Level II will now

be deduced to "perception of television as a source of information or companionship" (variable c') at Level III. For the purpose of this study, the concept of viewing for "companionship" will include viewing for companionship, viewing to fill empty time, and viewing to alleviate boredom and loneliness.

Television appears to play at least two major roles in the lives of the elderly (viewing for information and viewing for companionship) although other incidental roles are possible as well. The two categories discussed here are not discrete but will overlap in many instances. This study will try to determine the ratio between these two categories. Each is discussed below.

First, for many old people, television provides a window to the outside world. News broadcasting attracted the largest elderly television audience in several studies (Davis, 1971, 1972; Davis et al., 1976; Davis & Kubey, 1982; Korzenny & Neuendorf, 1980; Kubey, 1980; Rubin & Rubin, 1982; Schramm, 1969). Many older people remain intellectually active and interested in learning. They have less education than younger adults, but when the effect of education is removed, they are more well-informed (Atchley, 1980). The preference for serious content appears to increase with age (Davis, 1971; Doolittle, 1979; Kubey, 1980; Wenner, 1976). Talk shows such as "Donahue" and documentary news magazines are consistently preferred (Davis, 1971; Rubin & Rubin, 1982; Schalinski, 1968; Wenner, 1976). Davis (1971) found that, in his California sample of older Americans, news and public affairs, drama, and educational programs were consistently preferred in that order. Adams and Groen (1974), reported that their large sample of older Canadians rated news and public affairs



as the most enjoyable of all program types. News was cited almost twice as frequently as any other single type of television offering as one of those programs most often watched. Not only do the elderly view more news and information programs than any other group, but they may also view such programs proportionately more than any other age group, even when education is controlled (Richards, 1971; Comstock, 1978).

There are several possible explanations for the older population's preference for news broadcasting. Kubey (1980) suggested that the aged may take a special interest in the events of the world because they have lived for so long and are "merging with the world" as they reach Erik Erikson's eighth and final developmental stage of ego integrity. Kubey further pointed out that, because this group is retired, television is not depended on for relaxation after a day's work. Instead, it is sought to fill a need for serious local information, which, prior to retirement, was derived from other sources.

There is little doubt that older Americans have a genuine interest in information and serious media content. Motives for choosing television content, however, can be multi-faceted and interrelated. For example, news broadcasting has been described as lending itself well to the phenomenon of para-social interaction with the newscaster (Horton & Strauss, 1957; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Consequently, viewing news for this purpose would have included some degree of motivation for companionship as well as information seeking, making it more difficult to isolate the information motive.

The same might be said of the motive of viewing news for the purpose of isolation reduction. The socially isolated are known to view more news than other groups, ostensibly in an attempt to reduce their

isolation from the outside world. When one is disengaged from the social milieu, one has "to watch more and more news to maintain even the illusion of being" (Berger, 1976, p. 134). This motive is believed to play at least some role in the elderly's strong preferences for news broadcasting. Television news can confirm for viewers their sense of participating in the events depicted and of being part of the human drama (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1974; McGuire, 1974). Doolittle (1979), however, found that, in an Indiana sample of senior citizen center patrons, news viewing was heaviest among those who experience the most social interaction. News viewing may, therefore, compliment interpersonal interaction as well as substitute for it.

Despite the high degree of para-social interaction between newscaster and viewer, the need for companionship was not the only reason for watching the news. Other motives found by Levy (1979) were the need to be informed, the need for comprehension of world affairs, the need to be reassured about the world situation, and for intellectual enrichment.

A second major role that television plays in the lives of the elderly is that of "surrogate companion." Television has been found in many studies to function as a means of companionship and isolation reduction (Adams & Groen, 1974; Schalinski, 1968; Schramm, 1969). Those who viewed television for this purpose showed the greatest affinity for the medium (Davis, 1971; Rubin & Rubin, 1982; Wenner, 1976).

Some older people may relate to those on the screen as former companions who are gone (Davis, 1971). Tannenbaum (1980) referred to television as a small social world that provided company for solitary viewers at least on a temporary basis.

Those elderly who find reading difficult due to visual impairment or who cannot easily go out to seek companionship, find in television an easy, economical, and readily available resource for a surrogate companion. The concept of para-social interaction discussed above, shows how the television personality can come to be perceived as a friend or confidant in a simulated face to face situation.

Davis (1971) studied the television viewing behavior of members of the American Association of Retired Persons in California. This group of active, mobile, older Americans met regularly for discussions on political and economic matters and had an above average educational level. Nevertheless, 63.3 percent of this sample termed the companionship function of television as a moderate or strong one, thus verifying the studies demonstrating that elderly audiences depend on television to provide companionship as well as information in their lives.

Other studies, too, have corroborated the findings that, while viewing for information was the most dominant viewing characteristic of older Americans, great importance was attached to the companionship function of television as well. The more socially isolated respondents used television mainly for companionship and as compensation for lack of face to face interaction. This group, composed largely of women, had the greatest attachment to the medium, showing a high need to overcome loneliness and lift their spirits and a low need for intellectual stimulation. They viewed "soaps" a disproportionate number of hours. Game shows, religious programming, and talk shows also satisfied their special need for social integration. Older women, in particular, sought out programs that offered opportunity for vicarious participation in a

family. Possibly, this substituted for role loss in old age (Frank & Greenberg, 1980; Rubin & Rubin, 1982; Wenner, 1976).

A few communication researchers have advanced the proposition that the television viewing behavior of the elderly could be explained by substitution theory (Atchley, 1980). Schramm (1969), for example, was among the first to suggest that the elderly use the mass media to help combat disengagement from society. Graney and Graney (1974) and Petersen (1973) have also argued that media use compensates for reduced personal relationships and lost interpersonal channels of communication for older people. Their research, however, has been unable to consistently support "substitution theory." Graney and Graney (1974), for example, conducted a longitudinal study of elderly females living alone and in good health. Quantity of television viewing and level of social activity did not vary inversely in this study. Television, therefore, was not being used as a substitute for social involvement for these subjects. It should be noted, however, that these studies compared concrete measures of social interaction with quantity of viewing. Unlike the studies mentioned above, choice of programming, and viewing behavior were not considered. Schalinski (1968), whose qualitative study included subjective dimensions, found social isolation to be positively related to use of television.

The few studies that have examined the relationship between affective state and television viewing behavior have shown inconsistent results as well. McLeod, Ward, and Tancill (1965), for example, found no correlation between degree of alienation and television use among the elderly. They concluded that motives for the use of the mass media were too complex to be explained by simple displacement theories. Sargent

and Stempel (1968) found that, contrary to their hypothesis, those elderly scoring low in anomia were significantly higher in amount of television viewing. Korzenny and Neuendorf (1980) assumed that television characters were looked on as a reference group by the elderly population. They examined the interrelationships among amount of television viewing, choice of programs, and purpose for viewing: 1) viewing for information or 2) viewing to alleviate loneliness, alleviate boredom, or to fill empty time. Television was found to be heavily viewed and functionally important to the elderly. A positive self concept, however, was inversely related to television viewing for any purpose. Self concept was inversely related to amount of television use -- and a sense of alienation increased with television use regardless of the older person's motivation for viewing. These authors suggested that negative stereotypes associated with the portrayal of older characters were responsible for the diminished self concepts of heavy viewers. This relationship between self concept and amount of viewing, however, may have worked in the reverse direction.

Rubin and Rubin (1982) found life satisfaction to be negatively correlated with viewing for companionship and for passing time while Swank's (1979) study showed measures of satisfaction to be positively correlated with dependence on every media source except television. Another body of research explored the possibility that television viewing behavior was related to life cycle changes. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) believed that motives for viewing television and patterns of viewing behavior change with age and that age is a good predictor of the type of communication content that people select. Most research done in this area has borne out this theory with consistent

findings.

Cutler and Danowski (1980), for example, made a distinction between "content gratification" defined as viewing certain television messages for their substantive value, and "process gratification," defined as viewing to remain involved rather than for gratification from message content. They found that old people increasingly used television for process gratification. There was also some use of television content in order to discuss it with others. While the elderly subjects in this study may have been using television to combat loneliness, they were not interested in seeking diversion or escape. They appeared to seek involvement rather than escape, and learning rather than relaxation from the mass media.

Using television for companionship, to find something to talk about, to overcome loneliness or boredom, and to fill empty time were positively correlated with age in several studies. These motives tended to be positively associated with a strong attachment to television and negatively associated with self-reliance and economic security (Ostman & Jeffers, 1983; Rubin & Rubin, 1982). Schalinski (1968) and Comstock (Comstock et al. 1978; Comstock, 1980) added that life stage was also related to preferred content. Davis, (1972), found that "passing time" became an increasingly important motive for television viewing with advancing age. Forty-two percent of respondents aged 55 to 64 years cited this as very important while 80 percent of those over 75 designated it as very important.

Yet another way television serves to fill its information and companionship function for many older Americans pertains to religious broadcasting. Substantial numbers of older persons view religious

programs on television. In fact, they have responded enthusiastically to religious broadcasting since radio offered the first religious program in 1921 (Abrams, 1981).

The meaning of religious programming to the elderly is difficult to isolate. Moberg (1977), believed that, as church attendance among religiously oriented aging people decreases, use of media substitutes gradually increases. He and Abrams (1981) contended that church attendance and religious broadcast viewing behavior are functions of the gratifications received from each of these activities and vary with the individual. A very large study by Gaddy and Pritchard (1985) disclosed that the more frequently people watched religious broadcasting, the less frequently they attended church. Partialing out the degree of mobility of these respondents did not change this inverse relationship. The ages of the respondents in this sample were not specified. Those religious programs that bore the greatest functional similarity to church attendance produced the largest negative relationships. Comstock (1980) observed that some who did not find it difficult to attend services nevertheless chose television's broadcasting instead. Still others did both.

Adams and Groen (1974), found that religious programming played an important role in the lives of three out of every five Canadian elderly questioned in their study. One out of every four evaluated it as extremely important. Females and those in low spirits were more likely to attach great importance to religious programming. The religious service itself, with hymn singing and music were the two features preferred by this sample for greatest emphasis. A smaller proportion of respondents stated a desire for more sermons and inspirational messages.

Religious programming appeared to be a definite media need of this elderly sample. The need became more pronounced among those of advanced age and greater religious commitment.

Another information function that television appears to have filled for a portion of the elderly audience was that furnished by commercials. Although most elderly viewers express disdain for commercials, some attest to relying on them for product information. Rubin and Rubin (1982) found this to be only a very marginal motive for viewing television and one associated with lower levels of education. Smith (1982), however, found a positive correlation between reliance on mass media advertising and age. The findings of this study also showed that the ability to differentiate between factual claims and evaluative claims by advertisers diminished with age. Although the median educational level of this sample was reported to be 12.1 years, education was not used as a variable in this study. A study by Schreiber and Boyd (1980) paralleled Smith's findings. Sixty-nine percent of this elderly sample stated that television commercials were "often" or "always" useful to them. Those viewing three or more hours per day were more likely to find commercials useful. More Blacks than Whites chose television as the most influential contributor to consumer decisions. Such reliance on television commercials for consumer information varied inversely with education and socio-economic status as measured by former occupation. These differences were more salient than age. As in Smith's study, those over 70 admitted to being more confused between commercials and programs, facts and advertising. These findings appear to indicate that as some people grow old, they may rely more on television for consumer information. This conclusion appears reasonable



when one considers that the use of print media diminishes in old age.

There has been little observation of the media habits of older Americans who were confined to their homes, as this population has been relatively inaccessible. One study of housebound elderly revealed that the functions television filled for them in order of importance, were information, entertainment, overcoming boredom, education, and substitution for social interaction. Personal characteristics and length of their housebound status showed no association with television viewing behavior. The over-all finding of this study was that, despite the housebound status of these respondents, their use of television was comparable to that of the mobile elderly. Although the members of this housebound sample were extremely reliant on television, they did not watch longer hours or show evidence of being less discriminating in their viewing patterns than the mobile elderly (Anderson, 1984). Swank (1979) found, however, that the less mobile elderly relied more on television than they did on other forms of media or any other form of activity.

Finally, entertainment appears to be the most salient viewing motive. Communication research has demonstrated that any kind of television content may provide multiple gratifications for the viewer. Interfaced with all of these is the desire for entertainment. No television content, be it news, documentaries or religious fare is viewed by the public unless it is packaged as entertainment (Comstock, 1980; Comstock et al., 1978; Graney, 1974; Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974; Singer, 1980).

Rubin and Rubin (1982), recognizing the complexity of older Americans' viewing motives, attempted to sort out the interacting

relationships among them. They found that nearly all of the viewing motivations were significantly correlated with each other. Viewing for information was significantly related to viewing for arousal and entertainment. This may explain the information viewer's preference for news and talk-interview programming because, as noted above, these are packaged as entertainment. The information motive was likewise unrelated to amount of viewing, level of social interaction, or subjective measures of life satisfaction in this study.

It has been shown, then, that the information motive for viewing television was strongest among the elderly viewers. This was closely followed by the companionship motive. These motives, however, were complex and confounded by several interrelated dynamics. Whether television is viewed mainly for information or mainly for companionship is expected to influence the way television is used; the number of hours of viewing and the degree to which this viewing is discriminatory. These factors will be discussed below.

#### Number of Hours of Television Viewing

One of the quantitative aspects of viewing is simply the number of hours that a viewer spends devoted to the process of watching television. Quantitative use of television (variable d1) at Level II will, therefore, be deduced to "hours of viewing" (variable d'1) at Level III.

There is consensus among researchers that the elderly population watches a greater quantity of television than middle-aged and younger Americans. Based on self-reports, older Americans have been found to watch television from three to six hours daily. By a decisive margin,

television also occupies a greater proportion of the elderly person's time than any other activity. While some studies reported a drop in viewing after the age of 80, those over 80 still view more than the national average (Anderson, 1984; Atchley, 1974; Comstock et al., 1978; Cowgill & Baulch, 1962; Davis, 1971; DeGrazia, 1961; Doolittle, 1979; Frank & Greenberg, 1980; Harris & Associates, 1975; Hoar, 1960; Korzenny & Neuendorf, 1980; Kubey, 1980; Rubin & Rubin, 1981, 1982; Schramm, 1969; Schalinski, 1968; Schreiber & Boyd, 1980).

Under normal circumstances, television has been found to decrease involvement in other activities only when it is a novelty, but not later on (Comstock et al., 1978). Females view more than males in all age categories. Blacks view more than Whites but reverse a trend in that the Black elderly view somewhat less than younger Blacks (Comstock, 1980; Comstock et al., 1978; Davis, 1972; Young, 1979).

Studies attempting to link demographic and idiosyncratic variables with amount of viewing have yielded less consistent results in elderly samples. Adolescents who were not integrated into peer groups have been found to view significantly greater quantities of television (Johnstone, 1974). As stated above, this association has not been consistently demonstrated in studies of elderly samples.

In a recent study, Rubin and Rubin (1982) found that their sample of elderly people reported viewing an average of 4.76 hours per day, mostly during prime time, with females and those living alone viewing more. Viewing for companionship varied positively and significantly with number of hours viewed. Viewing for information was not correlated with quantity of viewing in this study.

Other studies have found no association of loneliness, living

arrangements, degree of social involvement, degree of confinement, degree of mobility, and affective state, with quantity of viewing in samples of senior citizens (Anderson, 1984; Davis, 1972; Graney, 1974; Moss & Lawton, 1982; Nordlund, 1978; Rubin & Rubin, 1981). Comstock et al. (1978) suggested that the lack of consistent findings linking personal characteristics to quantity of television viewing among the elderly may be due to the fact that increased viewing may not be related to the social context of the individual at all, but may simply be a function of the increased amount of time available to the older person.

There is little question that those who are socially isolated or confined to the home are more dependent on television (Anderson, 1984; Schalinski, 1968). It has not been substantiated by research, however, that either social context or idiosyncratic characteristics manifest themselves in higher consumption of television. Motives for viewing might have been better indicators. Rubin and Rubin (1982), however, have demonstrated their complexity by showing significant correlations among all viewing motives studied. The qualitative nature of television viewing, defined at Level III as the degree to which viewing is discriminatory (variable e'), may be a more salient outcome of social context and personal characteristics.

#### Degree to Which Viewing is Discriminatory

The degree to which viewing is discriminatory is, in fact, a deduction of the qualitative aspects of television viewing. Thus, "qualitative uses of television" (variable d2) at Level II is deduced to "discrimination in viewing" (variable d'2) at Level III. Viewers can be placed on a continuum between two types of qualitative television use:

discriminate and indiscriminate viewing.

As most studies of older American's use of television have done, this study used the definition of discriminate and indiscriminate use of television first devised by Schalinski (1968). These definitions can be paraphrased as follows. Discriminate viewers do not view television to the exclusion of involvement in social activity. Rather, television viewing is integrated into a range of other activities. The corollary of this involvement in activity is a posture of independence toward the medium resulting in critical appraisal of television offerings and selectivity in choosing programs. Indiscriminate viewers watch television to the exclusion of other social activities. They have adapted a passive role in life. The corollary of this passivity is an attitude of dependence on television resulting in uncritical acceptance of television as a primary satisfier of their needs and interests. They are less selective in their choice of programs.

Several studies of older Americans' viewing habits have demonstrated that discriminate and indiscriminate viewers did indeed conform to these definitions. Schalinski (1968) found that his elderly subjects who were indiscriminate viewers were reluctant to make any criticism whatsoever of television content or personalities and were grateful for whatever programming was offered. He attributed this to their dependent status. Davis (1972) found that those elderly in his sample who were in poor health, were the least critical of television; this, too, may have been an indication of their greater dependence. Discriminatory viewing also increased with income. On the whole, Davis (1972) described his sample as being passive viewers rather than critical viewers. Some 69 percent constituted a happy and satisfied

television audience in all dimensions. Kubey (1978) found that the heaviest viewers were the least discriminating and exerted less control over what they watched. These indiscriminate viewers fell into a cyclical pattern of heavy viewing, which further increased passivity.

On the other hand, there is evidence that the elderly are largely a selective and discriminating audience. Wenner (1976) studied style of viewing as a function of variables such as widowhood, living arrangements, and degree of social interaction. A factor analysis divided his elderly respondents into three types of television viewers. Type I viewers comprised almost half of his sample and all but one of those who were married. This group conformed to Schalinski's (1968) definition of discriminate viewers given above: they incorporated television viewing into other activities. They were also socially mobile and oriented toward information content, often watching television when they wanted to be alone. Types II and III fell more toward the indiscriminate end of the continuum. These were widowed, living alone, and socially isolated. They used television mainly for companionship. Type III also used television to fill empty time and for a topic of conversation with others. Wenner (1976) concluded from his study that indiscriminate use of television was, in part, a function of the losses that occur with the aging process. Davis (1982) also concluded that viewing behavior was clearly more indiscriminate for the widowed population than for those who were married and socially involved.

The fact that television becomes more favorable to the older generation and diminishes as an object of criticism may be due to life stage, rather than generational differences. The very old are more

inclined to merge with the world rather than fight it (Doolittle, 1979; Kubey, 1980).

Researchers have found that, in general, the elderly (particularly women) are more likely to plan ahead, carefully allot time for favorite programs, and express clear likes and dislikes (Bower, 1973; Comstock et al., 1978; Frank & Greenberg, 1980; Graney & Graney, 1974; Rubin & Rubin, 1982). Frank and Greenberg (1980), who studied a sample consisting of all adult age categories, found that 55.4 percent of all television programs watched involved some degree of advance planning. The elderly segments of this sample were 14 percent above this figure. The authors suggested that this group may have had a greater need for surrogate friendships, which require more planning in advance, since para-social relationships require continued exposure. Over 26 percent did not use any sort of TV Guide for this planning. This may have been due to the fact that the elderly segment of this sample had the highest percentage of non-readers.

While some studies, then, have found older people to be indiscriminate and passive viewers, the elderly in general appear to be careful planners of their television viewing. For the most part, the picture of older Americans wiling away idle hours in front of the television set, may not be accurate.

In harmony with the conceptual framework of the current study, the literature has generally indicated that the relationships between concrete factors in the environment and affective state in old age was often contingent on underlying personality characteristics and the individual's historical degree of competence in defining the situation and forming appropriate attitudinal values. However, research findings

on the relationship of these factors to the television viewing behavior of older Americans have been less illuminating. There appears to be no clear linear associations between involvement in activities or interpersonal interaction with television viewing behavior. Nor have studies of the association of such subjective factors as morale, happiness, alienation, and locus of control with television viewing behavior yielded any strong or consistent results.

Yet, it makes intuitive sense that individuals' subjective states would influence their television viewing behavior. Hence, this study has purported to investigate the relationship between television viewing behavior and a more basic and global measure of affective state: purpose in life. This concept, which measured one's sense of meaning or purpose in existence, was comprised of the "spiritual dimension of being" (Frankl, 1967, p. 75) or what the symbolic interactionists referred to as the "spiritual self" (James, 1892/1981).

### Chapter Summary

Chapter II started with a brief presentation of the undergirding conceptual framework of this study, that of symbolic interactionism with a particular emphasis on situationalism. The elements of this conceptual framework that were identified as particularly important for the theory being tested here include the various social selves including the "spiritual self," one's definition of the situation, and ascription of meaning to objects in the environment.

The literature has been reviewed within a context of proposition presentation at three levels of abstraction. The first level outlined



theoretical propositions at the level of the conceptual framework. Level II identified the same theoretical concepts presented at a somewhat lower level of abstraction -- the level identified as "theoretical application." Level III presented the same concepts a third time, now deduced to a level of specific theoretical propositions related to the specifics of involvement and perceived purpose in life of the elderly and their implications on definitions and uses of television in their lives. Specific theoretical propositions from this level are summarily listed below. Figure 4 presents the entire theoretical model (a combination of Figures 1 through 3). The final level of propositional deduction, that of the testable hypothesis, will be outlined in the next chapter.

Proposition a'1 - b': There is a positive linear relationship between the extent that the elderly are involved in activities and their perceived existential purpose in life.

Proposition a'2 - b': There is a positive linear relationship between the extent that the elderly are involved in interpersonal interaction and their perceived existential purpose in life.

Proposition b' - c': There is a positive linear relationship between the elderly's perceived existential purpose in life and the extent to which they see television primarily as a source of information (over companionship) or a source of companionship (over information).

Proposition c' - d'1: There is a positive linear relationship between the extent to which the elderly see television primarily as a source of information (rather than companionship) and the total number of hours that they spend viewing television.

Proposition c' - d'2: There is a positive linear relationship between the extent to which the elderly see television primarily as a source of information (rather than companionship) and the extent to which they reveal discriminatory patterns of program selection and television useage.

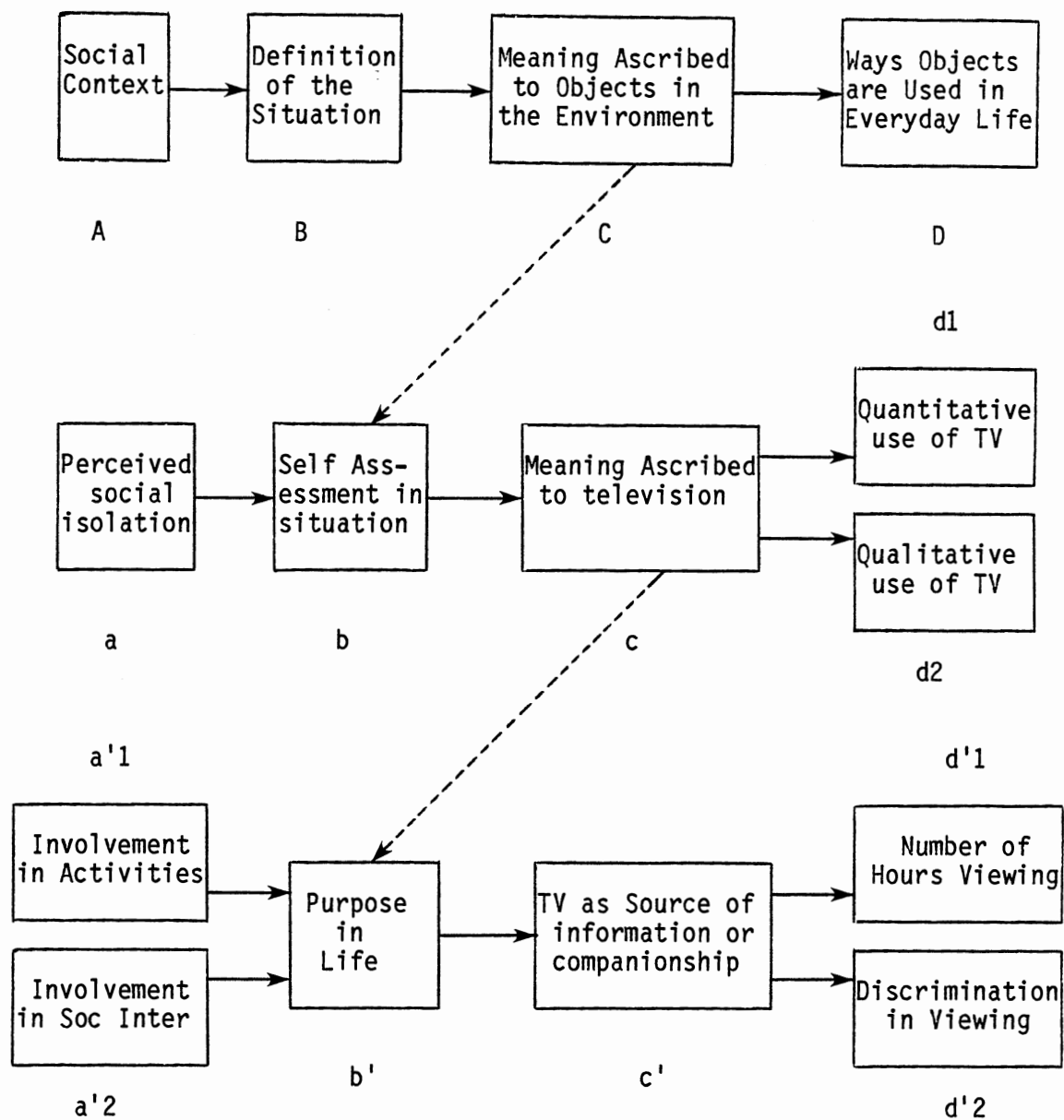


Figure 4: Summary of Propositions at Level I Through III

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The current chapter is devoted to the operationalization of the concepts at the third level of abstraction. First, it describes the concepts tested at this level, the variables used to measure those concepts, the instrument, the pilot study, and the subsequent revision of the instrument. It then discusses the sample, the collection of the data, the return rate, various problems encountered in the data collection process, and the final decisions on scaling. Lastly, the statistical analysis is described.

The five concepts measured at Level III (the level of specific proposition), are Degree of Interpersonal Interaction, Individual's Sense of Meaning or Purpose in Life, Use of Television for Information or for Companionship, Degree to Which Television Viewing is Discriminatory, and the Number of Hours Spent in Television Viewing.

#### Operationalization and Instrumentation

The initial instrument was a 103 item questionnaire which was meant to be self administered. Most of the responses were presented as Likert-type scales with ordinal values purporting to measure the theoretical concepts. In addition, it included some open-ended questions designed to shed more light on the individual's use of television for information or for companionship. One of these asked

respondents to list their favorite television personalities. Having many favorite television personalities could indicate the presence of parasocial interaction and use of television for companionship. A third open-ended question asked the subject to write a short paragraph on, "Why television is important in my life."

In all, the initial questionnaire contained 21 questions measuring interpersonal interaction, 20 questions measuring Purpose in Life, 18 questions measuring use of television for information or as a companion, nine questions to calculate weekly hours of television viewing, and seven questions measuring the degree of discrimination used in television viewing. Most of the remaining questions pertained to the secondary objective of the study and demographic data are described in detail below.

#### Involvement in Interpersonal Interaction

The group of questions measuring involvement in interpersonal interaction was composed of several specific indicators of the concrete social situation. It included questions on the frequency of face to face interaction with other people, telephone conversations with other people, social activities engaged in outside the home, et cetera. One category of these questions required Likert-type responses ranging from one to five: "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," and "always."

A second category of indicators of this conceptual variable asked essentially the same questions, but contained an answering format designed to ferret out evidence of any possible shrinkage of the social context. The answering format for this group of indicators consisted of Likert-type responses ranging from one to three: "less...," "the

same...," or "more...than seven to ten years ago."

### The Purpose In Life Test

The degree to which the respondents in this study perceived a sense of meaning or purpose in their lives was measured by Crumbaugh and Maholick's Purpose in Life Test. The theoretical framework for this test was based on the work of Viktor Frankl, described in Chapter II. Crumbaugh (1963) defined Frankl's concept of meaning as "a person's goals around which to integrate his life" or "a sense of mission that is essentially one's own and that gives direction to life and makes it understandable" (p. 205). Crumbaugh and Maholick developed the Purpose in Life Test to enable the quantification of meaning in life in order to measure existential vacuum as defined by Frankl, and to differentiate this construct from other orientations. The scale consists of 20 items, each of which varies along a seven point continuum, from a strong positive to a strong negative response. The direction of the questions are randomized in order to prevent a position preference.

The Purpose in Life Test has been shown to have a high validity and reliability. A split-half (odd-even) reliability was determined by Crumbaugh and Maholick in 1964 as a Pearson correlation of .81 (corrected to a .90 Spearman correlation) and again in 1968 with correlations of .85 (and .92). The scale's construct validity was demonstrated when Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) and Crumbaugh (1968) showed the Test to successfully differentiate between normal groups and psychiatric patients. It also discriminated among four normal groups who ranged from highly successful individuals to indigents, with the Purpose in Life scores regressing as predicted.

In order to learn whether the existential vacuum described by Frankl was indeed a separate syndrome, correlations were sought between the Purpose in Life Test and several other attitudinal scales. Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) and Crumbaugh (1968) found no significant correlations between the Purpose in Life Test and any of the scales included in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory with the exception of the K Scale, which measures defensiveness, and the Depression Scale. They also found significant correlations between the Purpose in Life Test and both the Srole Anomie Scale (1956) and the Elmore Anomie Scale (1967). Comparison with the California Psychological Inventory showed no significant correlations (Garfield, 1973). Likewise, no relationships were found between the Purpose in Life Test and valuing competence as measured by six measures of the Allport Vernon Lindsey Scale of Values (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) and the full battery of values of the Rokeach Value Survey (1967) with the exception of "future orientation" and "search for salvation" (Simmons, 1980). The Purpose in Life Test, then, has consistently shown the construct of Purpose in Life to be unrelated to valuing competence, with the exception of religious values, whereas its relationship to anomia and depression has been less clearly demonstrated.

As discussed earlier, both the authors of the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) and Frankl (1984), believed that purpose in life was independent of anomia. Significantly, Garfield (1973) found no correlations between the Purpose in Life Test and the Srole Anomie Scale or the McClosky Schaar Anomie Scale (1965).

The relationship between the Purpose in Life Test and measures of depression has been more consistent. Crumbaugh and Maholick reported

Pearson correlations between Purpose in Life scores and the Depression Scale of the MMPI of  $-.30$  (1964) and  $-.65$  (1968). In a later study, Varna Garis (1977) found a Pearson correlation of  $-.83$  between the Purpose in Life Test and Beck's Depression Inventory (1961). This sample differed from those of Crumbaugh and Maholick's (1964) in that it was composed entirely of elderly people, about one third of whom resided in nursing homes.

The authors of the Purpose in Life Test and Frankl, however, have pointed out that depression could either result from or be the cause of a low sense of meaning in life. They believed that the sense of meaning or purpose in life was a more generic term than depression and was a unique and unidimensional condition (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Frankl, 1967). All research to date has appeared to bear out these opinions. For example, studies described in the previous chapter have compared the Purpose in Life Test with additional measures of personality, values, and attitudes, plus measures of morale, religiosity, presence of future orientation, and locus of control. All results have pointed to the uniqueness of the purpose in life construct and the consistency with which the Purpose in Life Test has supported Frankl's concepts (Accuff & Allen, 1970; Acuff & Gorman, 1968; Arafat, Acuff, & Allen, 1970; Crandall & Rasmussen, 1975; Crumbaugh, Raphael, & Shraeder 1970; Harrison, 1983; Simmons, 1980; Tellis-Nayak, 1982).

As stated above, this study assumes that a low Purpose in Life will, in the older person, manifest itself in the turning to the medium of television as a diversionary measure. It is also expected to influence the way in which television is used: for information or for companionship.

### Use of Television for Information or Companionship

The use of television for information and the use of television for companionship are not mutually exclusive, since all people use television to fill multiple needs (Bogart, 1980; Comstock et al., 1978; Singer, 1980). The purpose here was to determine whether television was used mainly for information or mainly for companionship. To determine the degree to which television was used for information, respondents were asked to what extent they watched television to know what was going on in the world, to what extent they watched television to get information they needed, and whether they depended on television for news more now than they did in the past.

Use of television for companionship was measured by questions asking the extent to which respondents used television to alleviate loneliness and to make the house seem less empty. The use of television as a means of engaging in parasocial interaction was probed as well. To provide some longitudinal dimensions, respondents were also asked whether they were leaving the set on for company more now than in the past.

According to the hypotheses of this study, subjects who use television mainly for information were expected to view fewer hours of television and choose programs for viewing in a more discriminatory manner. Those viewing television mainly for companionship and engagement in para-social interaction, on the other hand, were expected to view more hours of television and select programs for viewing in a less discriminatory manner.



### Hours of Viewing and Discrimination

Respondents were asked to report the number of hours per week spent in television viewing. To facilitate this calculation for the respondent, an average weekday was broken into three segments and respondent was asked to fill in the number of hours he or she usually spent viewing during each of these segments. Respondents were then asked how many hours they usually viewed on an average Saturday and an average Sunday.

Discrimination was operationalized by inquiring about the manner in which television programs were selected for viewing. Subjects were asked such questions as how often they used the TV Guide and how often they viewed a program simply because it followed a show they had been viewing on the same channel. According to the definition of indiscriminate viewing used in this study (Schalinski, 1968), an elderly person who views television in an indiscriminate fashion may be very dependent on television. Such a person assumes a passive posture toward the medium and is therefore reluctant to criticize the medium for any reason. To investigate this possibility, questions were included soliciting criticism of television offerings. Absence of criticism of television programming was interpreted as passivity and a lack of discrimination in television viewing. It was hypothesized that those who viewed television mainly for companionship did so in a less discriminatory fashion and viewed more hours of television. This completed the list of indicators used to measure the concepts in the hypothesis. They are provided below in Figure 5 for heuristic purposes.

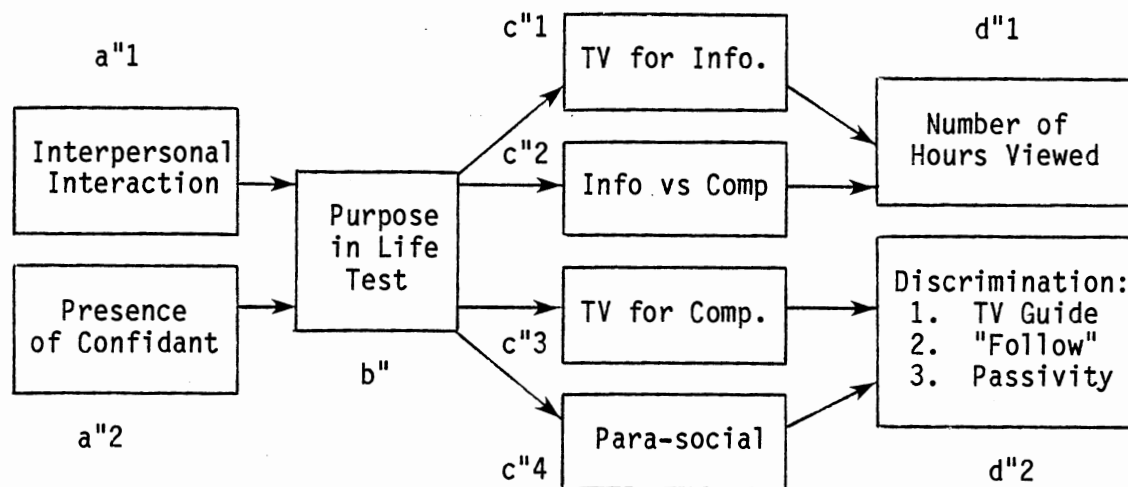


Figure 5. Hypotheses at Level IV Showing Variable Indicators

#### Pilot Study and Revisions in the Instrument

Consistent with accepted procedures for a study of this nature, a pilot study was undertaken to refine the method of operations and the questionnaire prior to actual collection of the final data. Two locations in the same state were chosen and the original 103 item questionnaire was administered to two groups who were judged to be as similar as possible to the intended sample in age and other demographic characteristics. The first group was composed of patrons of an all Black Salvation Army Congregate Meal Center for senior citizens in a neighboring city approximately the same size as the one chosen for the study. After completing their meal, the patrons of this center expressed reluctance to remain long enough to fill out the

questionnaire, but later agreed to do so in exchange for a small cash stipend for each respondent. Although none were willing to stay originally, twenty five patrons of the center offered to do so after being offered the stipend. Some helped friends whose hearing and vision were inadequate for hearing the instructions or reading the questionnaires.

The second group participating in the pilot study was composed of the all-white patrons of a senior citizens' center in a small university town in the same state. The director of this center, accustomed to requests from researchers, allowed researchers to conduct studies at this senior center in return for a small cash donation to the center for each questionnaire completed. In addition, two elderly secretaries who were still employed and three residents of a nursing home were given questionnaires.

The two secretaries reported the questionnaire to run smoothly and pose no difficulty for them. The questionnaires completed by the three shut-ins in the nursing home were administered in the form of a structured interview due to the inability of these subjects to read and self administer the instrument.

Self administration of the questionnaire in the two senior centers proved to be an arduous task for many of the patrons. Most required from one to one and a half hours for completion of the questionnaire, a much longer period of time than most patrons at Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers normally remained after the meal. Moreover, many of the respondents appeared not to have read or not to have understood the directions for responding to the scales in the questionnaire. Some went through the questionnaire simply placing check

marks in the margins rather than circling a value in the ordinal scales provided. Open-ended questions were entirely ignored in most cases. Consequently, at least one fourth of the questionnaires were not adequate for analysis. The pilot study yielded forty-five usable questionnaires; sixteen from the Salvation Army Congregate Meal Center for senior citizens, three from the nursing home, two from the secretaries, and 24 from the senior center in the small university town. The greater number of satisfactory questionnaires from the small university town could be explained by the fact that the director of this center assigned people to help the patrons understand and complete the questionnaire. It is doubtful that this assistance would have been forthcoming without the monetary compensation to the center. No compensation was to be offered in the actual study. In view of the difficulty experienced by the respondents in the pilot study, it was decided to revise the instrument.

#### Revision of the Instrument

It was obvious that, among other problems demonstrated in the pilot study, the questionnaire was too long for the group of intended subjects. Drastic shortening was indicated. This necessitated going through the measures and making difficult decisions on which had the highest priority for retention and which could be justifiably deleted.

#### Deletion of Items

Some of the decisions on deletion of items were made by a panel of judges and others were based on an analysis of the pilot study. The following will provide an example of how these decisions were made.

On an admittedly suspect factor analysis, with an "n" that was too small for reliable rotation, a picture nevertheless emerged that one of the items that was meant to measure discrimination - "Do you plan ahead each day or once a week which shows you will watch?" - loaded significantly with "Do you participate in formal groups outside your home?" and "Do you participate in informal groups outside your home?" - with a factor loading of .73. It did not load with the other variables meant to measure discrimination. In trying to construct the underlying dimension measured by this item, it was judged that the dimension was most likely some flavor of organization or structure in one's day to day life. Since the item on planning ahead which shows one would watch did not load with the other discriminatory measures but rather with engagement in structured activities, it was judged not to be a good measure of the theoretical variable "extent of discrimination in television viewing." Hence, the item was dropped. In a similar manner, several other measures were deleted from the scales.

Open-ended questions had been largely ignored by the participants of the pilot study. When asked about names of programs, for example, most subjects were able to respond only if the researcher jogged their memories by naming some programs. Schalinski (1968,) when studying television viewing behavior of elderly people in a retirement home, reported the same experience. He concluded that this type of information could not be gleaned from elderly subjects through self-administered questionnaires and followed up his survey with personal interviews. Therefore, with the exception of one or two questions requiring single-word answers, open-ended questions were eliminated from the instrument.

### Shortening the Purpose in Life Test

The need to shorten and simplify the instrument gave rise to reconsideration of using the entire Purpose in Life Test, or some portion of it, to measure subject's definition of the situation. Although, the authors of the scale advised that children and adults who had completed the fourth grade reported having no difficulty with self-administration of the instrument (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1968), many respondents in this pilot study were unable to do so and displayed difficulty in understanding the instructions, the vocabulary, and the intent of some of the questions.

It is possible that the Purpose in Life Test has not been tested extensively on elderly subjects of this socio-economic level. The elderly subjects for Acuff and Allen's (1970) and Acuff and Gorman's (1968) studies were retired university professors. The elderly subjects for the Varna Garis study (1977) had been selected by social workers and nursing home directors on the basis of their competence to handle the instrument. Garfield (1973), however, administered the Purpose in Life Test to six subgroups of the population ranging from ghetto residents to graduate engineers. On the basis of the results, he questioned the contention of Crumbaugh and Maholick (1968) that individuals with a fourth grade education had no difficulty with this instrument. Several of his subjects who were high school graduates expressed discomfort in dealing with the Purpose in Life Test. As in the current study, he also found that interpretations of some of the questions varied among the subcultural groups participating in his research. Garfield concluded that this instrument may have been too difficult for some groups and

that it contained a certain degree of cultural contamination.

An alternative explanation could be that the level of education of some of the respondents in the current study might not have been accurately reported. In some cases, the self-reported level of education seemed incongruous with the respondent's ability to read, write, and complete the questionnaire. In addition, there were eight missing values for Purpose in Life (a valid percentage of 17.8). This meant that 17.8 percent of the respondents in the pilot study skipped over the scale entirely. It was, therefore, decided to choose only five questions from the Purpose in Life Test to measure the concept of purpose in life. Questions were selected on the basis of two criteria: 1) their judged salience in describing existential vacuum and 2) the ease with which they were understood by the respondents.

#### Other Changes in the Instrument

Several of the questions in the instrument provided a choice of answers on a continuum of one to five with three being a neutral value. It read: "never, rarely, sometimes, often," and "always." Because a large number of the respondents in the pilot study circled the neutral value, "sometimes" for every question, it was decided to eliminate this category and force a choice from among the four remaining values.

Finally, and on the advice of an ophthalmologist, Dr. T. Acers, who was consulted after the pilot study, (personal communication, April 28, 1985) the print of the entire questionnaire was enlarged to 14 point type and presented in heavy black lettering on a white contrast. White space between items was increased. This necessitated making some of the categories broader, eliminating some of the examples provided with some

of the questions, and deleting all but the very essential questions on demographic information in order to fit the questions onto the pages in their new format while avoiding excessive bulk.

In all, the 103 item questionnaire was revised and reduced to 53 items, which still measured the original variables in the study. A copy of the final instrument used in the study can be found in the appendix.

### Collection of the Data

The following section describes the sample used in this study and the methods used for collection of the data. It also discusses the response rate and some of the difficulties encountered in the collection of the data.

The study took place in a metropolitan area of approximately 500,000 population in a southcentral state. The sample for the quantitative data came from two sources: the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) and the Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers for senior citizens.

The author gained permission to address seven of the city's nine chapters of the AARP at their respective monthly meetings. The study was described to them much as it is described on the cover of the questionnaire (see appendix). Because the directors of the AARP did not wish to disrupt their business meetings or their previously planned agendas, the questionnaires were not filled out during the AARP meetings. Instead, they were distributed to the AARP members with return, self-addressed envelopes. Given that anonymity was assured, follow-ups for unreturned questionnaires were not possible.

Permission to collect data was likewise granted by 16 of the city's



17 Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers for senior citizens. Only the Spanish speaking Center declined to participate. One Center, whose director unexpectedly resigned on the day the data was to be collected, was eliminated from the study because there was no one to expedite the data collection. Data were collected, therefore, at 15 Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers for senior citizens.

The patrons were addressed while they ate their lunch. The study was explained and a request was made that they reserve a short period of time after their meal to complete the questionnaire. It was originally planned that the researcher would read each question aloud and have the respondents fill in the answers in concert. However, the great variation in the respondents' abilities to handle the questionnaire precluded this method. Notwithstanding the fact that the questionnaire had been greatly shortened and simplified, some respondents required almost a full hour while many others completed it easily in twenty minutes. Due to this wide disparity in competence, subjects filled out the questionnaires independently while the researcher and one trained assistant circulated among them assisting where necessary.

Thus, the data were collected. Since many of the groups, both in the Salvation Army Center and the AARP met concurrently, the process of collecting the data spanned a period of three and a half months: from the end of May through August of 1985.

#### Response Rate

Approximately 95 percent of those present at each of the AARP meetings accepted a questionnaire. In all, 244 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 204 (or 80 percent) were returned by mail.

The Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers presented a somewhat different picture. Only 30 to 60 percent of those present at each Center agreed to accept and fill out a questionnaire. One hundred percent of those questionnaires were returned, due to the questionnaires being completed and handed back to the researcher on the spot. However, a varying amount (up to a high of one-fourth) of those questionnaires proved to be unusable (see below).

Upon completion of the data collection, the questionnaires were examined by the researcher. Questionnaires that were partially or incorrectly filled out were examined by a panel of judges. It was decided that in many of these, even the data that was properly filled in could not be trusted, as the respondents had obviously not understood the instructions. Hence, a total of 50 questionnaires were removed from the study: three from the AARP sample and 47 from the Salvation Army sample. In all, 509 questionnaires were returned. Fifty, or 10 percent of these were eliminated from the study, leaving a total of 459 responses.

#### Problems Encountered in Gathering the Data

As mentioned above, as few as 30 percent of the patrons in some of the Salvation Army Senior Centers accepted questionnaires. It was noted that those Centers in which patrons remained after lunch to play dominoes were the least responsive. A large number of these domino players wore hearing aids and appeared oblivious to the researcher's description of the study and request for respondents. The greatest responses occurred in the centers where patrons remained after lunch to play Bridge. Although the Bridge games commenced immediately after the

meal, these subjects carried the questionnaires to the bridge tables where they eventually completed them. This group expressed great interest in the study. The Centers in which the patrons left immediately after lunch, varied in their responses.

Many of the older people at the Salvation Army Centers were anxious to talk to the researcher about television, expressing many strong opinions and voicing many complaints about network offerings and commercials. They declined, however, to accept questionnaires with such comments as, "It looks like a lot of reading." or, "I don't want to do all that writing." This is consistent with Schalinski (1968) who reported that, although his elderly subjects were very eager to be interviewed, reactions to the printed questionnaires were negative.

It has already been mentioned that there was great variation in the respondents' abilities to complete the questionnaire. Although there was a wide age range, there did not seem to be any consistent trend correlating difficulty in completing the questionnaire with age and education. Some 89 and 90 year olds had less difficulty with the questionnaire than did some of the respondents in their seventies.

It was obvious that many had not read the instructions for the scales. For some questions with Likert-type responses, for example, they circled two, three, or even four answers. Others ignored the ordinal responses and circled or checked those statements with which they completely agreed and ignored the questions with which they disagreed. It was not anticipated by the researcher, for another example, that they would have difficulty with a question as simple as, "What is your race?" Many answered "American" or gave some other kinds of answers; a few gave such answers as "Texas" or "Louisiana."

As stated earlier, the researcher and one trained assistant were available to assist those respondents who could not complete the questionnaire independently. Many requested this assistance. Others who obviously needed help refused and insisted that they were capable of filling out the questionnaire on their own. Nearly all those accepting or requesting help were women. In the entire sample, only two men allowed themselves to be assisted. One of these was visibly embarrassed and frequently joked to his companions about being the only "dummy" in the group. The only other man who requested and accepted help insisted on being helped by the younger and more attractive research assistant, showing more interest in her than in the questionnaire. The fact that males are socialized towards active mastery much more so than are females in our society may explain the embarrassment these elderly men appeared to feel at needing help with the questionnaire.

#### Comparison with a Recent Similar Study

Questionnaire surveys among samples demographically similar to the current study have reported similar experiences in data collection. Schalinski (1968) and Anderson (1984), for example, simplified and shortened their questionnaires after conducting pilot studies. Unlike the present study, Schalinski distributed his revised questionnaires to a select group judged capable of completing them while Anderson allowed visiting nurses to help the respondents complete them in their homes. Despite these efforts to facilitate data collection, Schalinski reported that, of the 59 percent of returned questionnaires, almost 10 percent were unusable, resulting in a return rate of barely 50 percent. Anderson reported a return rate of 46 percent. There was slightly less

than a 50 percent return rate for Davis's (1971) AARP sample and a 31 percent rate from Maddes' (1985) sample of elderly women. The response rates of the subjects in those studies were similar to that of the Salvation Army sample in the current study. Since the AARP is a politically active organization, the nature of its membership may have contributed to the greater response and interest in this study.

### Minority Groups

Neither the AARP chapters nor the Salvation Army Senior Citizen Congregate Meal Centers appeared to be racially integrated in the city in which this research took place. There was one all-Black AARP chapter. The Salvation Army centers included two all-Black centers, two Native American Centers and one Spanish American Center. Since the television viewing behavior and possible unique media needs of these minority groups were highly relevant to this study, it was considered disappointing that the data collection afforded an adequate sampling of only one segment of these groups: that of Black females.

The Black AARP chapter was composed entirely of females. The two Black Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers were located in senior citizens apartment buildings. Many but not all of the congregated meal patrons lived there as well. At one of these centers, the number of men appearing for lunch was rather small. Only four of these males agreed to accept a questionnaire, although the response from the women was very good.

The second Black Salvation Army Center appeared to have a greater ratio of men to women than the previously mentioned center. The study was explained to the patrons during the meal in the usual fashion. On

completing the meal, all the men in this group promptly retired to the domino tables. Although these Black males appeared somewhat younger and less frail than did the Domino players at the White senior centers, they were equally unresponsive to the researcher's repeated invitations to participate in the study. The Black women at this center advised that efforts to persuade these men to participate would be futile. According to the women, these men played Dominoes all day, seven days a week, with the exception of Sunday morning, when the women "put up" the dominoes in order to ensure that the men attended church services. Consequently, there were only four Black male respondents in the whole sample.

Very few people attended the Native American Centers with even fewer of these being either Native Americans or senior citizens. There were 20 patrons present at the first Native American Center, but these included children and grandchildren of the senior citizens as well as several Caucasians. Of the seven Native American senior citizens present, only four filled out questionnaires. The picture at the second Native American Center was similar and only seven usable questionnaires were acquired from Native Americans, yielding a total of 11 Native Americans for the entire sample.

The Spanish American Salvation Army Senior Center had a large number of patrons. This group, however, convened only once a week at which time a Public Health Nurse was in attendance to take blood pressures and blood samples. Full entertainment programs were scheduled each week as well. The director, therefore, felt that it would not be possible to add the research study to this busy agenda and declined to participate.

## Statistical Analysis

### Univariate Frequency Distributions

The statistical analysis was begun with simple frequencies in order to examine the distributions of all of the variables. A few of these were found to have distributions that were too skewed to be entered into the statistical analysis. These will be discussed in the following chapter. The remaining frequencies were calculated for several subgroups of the sample in order to search out important differences that might have existed among them. The sample was broken down by Salvation Army, AARP, sex, young old category (55-74), old old age category (75 and older), young old male, young old female, old old male, old old female, race, marital status, living alone, living with others, living in independent housing, and living in retirement housing. There was very little variation among these groups on any of the variables. Variables showing the largest differences in two or more groups were selected out and subjected to T-tests. A few of these reached statistical significance but were not judged to be substantively significant and are not reported here. It was, therefore, deemed unnecessary to involve any of the subgroups of the sample in further analysis.

### Scaling Based on Factor Analysis

Originally, questions from various sources, including some based on the researcher's intuitive judgment, were used to make up the scales intended to measure the conceptual variables of interest to this study. After the data collection, a factor analysis was conducted to determine

if the items expected to measure each of the concepts under investigation had, indeed, been answered as a unit by the respondents. For simplicity of interpretation, an orthogonal rotation of factors was executed (Ferguson, 1981). Hence, the factor analysis was used in this study, not as part of the statistical analysis, but for two other reasons: 1) as an aid in determining the contribution of each variable to the theoretical concept it purported to measure and 2) to further ensure the accuracy of the scales that were structured to measure those concepts.

The factor analysis confirmed that most of the scales were by and large correct. In a few cases, however, a variable included in one scale did not load with the other variables in that scale. Where there was some doubt about the validity of such a variable, it was deleted from the analysis reported in the following chapter. In other cases, such variables were still judged to be conceptually sound and were retained as separate measures of the concepts they were intended to measure. In such instances, there were two indicators of the same concept: one was the multiple item measure consisting of the questions that loaded together on the same factor; the second was the question that did not load with the others but was considered nevertheless to be conceptually sound. These instances will be described in more detail below.

The scales used to measure the theoretical concepts now underwent final streamlining. As described above, however, the findings of the frequency distributions and the factor analysis guided the final structuring of the scales causing several variables to be deleted and others to be used as separate indicators.



### Interpersonal Interaction

The theory distinguished between involvement in activities and involvement in interpersonal interaction (see Figure 4). At the level of measurement, however, the variables loaded on the same factor (Table I). For this reason, the scale, "interpersonal interaction" includes both dimensions (activities and interpersonal interaction).

TABLE I  
FACTOR SCORES OF ITEMS ON THE SCALE, "INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION"

Loading	Variables
.31	Your health (or your spouse's) rarely keeps you from going out.
.28	You visit with people by telephone
.47	You visit with people in person
.70	You engage in activities outside the home

This scale was the sum of four questions measuring the degree of respondents' engagement in activities outside the home and their interaction with other people (see Table I). The response format consisted of a Likert-type scale with values ranging from one to four: "never," "rarely," "often," and "always" respectively. They read:

1) "Your health (or your spouse's) keeps you from going out," 2) "You visit with people by telephone," 3) "You visit with people in person," and 4) "You are involved in activities outside your home." Note that one item ("You visit with people by telephone") had a lower factor loading than normally considered significant for inclusion on a factor. Again, the factor analyses were only guides to supplement the theoretical scaling. This item was considered a viable measure of interpersonal interaction; therefore, this is one example of theoretical considerations out-weighing the factor analytical results.

In addition to the scale measuring interpersonal interaction, a separate indicator of this concept was employed. This indicator was a qualitative measure inquiring about the existence of at least one close relationship or confidant (see Table II).

TABLE II  
FACTOR SCORE OF THE CONFIDANT ITEM SHOWING ITS  
RELATIONSHIP TO THE PURPOSE IN LIFE SCALE

Loading	Variable
.74	You have someone to confide in
.81	Purpose in Life

The scale wording read: "You have someone to confide in" with the same answering format. This variable did not load on the same factor as the purely quantitative measures of interpersonal interaction, but loaded on the "purpose in life" factor with a factor loading of .74 (see Table II). It was included because it made conceptual sense. Indeed, Frankl (1984) and Maddi (1967) have stressed the connection of having an intimate relationship to a high purpose in life. The factor loading, notwithstanding, having a confidant has been demonstrated by a large body of research (discussed in Chapter II) to be a salient measure of one's social situation. It was, therefore, retained as a separate measure of the concept of interpersonal interaction.

#### Purpose in Life

The five indicators of the theoretical concept "Purpose in Life" were the five questions chosen from Crumbaugh and Maholick's Purpose in Life Test. These questions were answered on a seven-point continuum with one depicting the lowest sense of purpose in life and seven the highest. The questions read as follows:

1. My life is: 1) Empty, filled only with despair and 7) Running over with exciting things.
2. If I should die today, I would feel that my life has been: 1) completely worthless, and 7) very worthwhile.
3. Facing my daily tasks is: 1) A painful and boring experience and 7) A source of pleasure and satisfaction.
4. I am usually: 1) Completely bored and 7) exuberant, enthusiastic.

5. I have discovered: 1) No mission or purpose in life  
and 7) clear cut goals and a satisfying life purpose.

The concept "Purpose in Life" was computed as the sum of these five measurements.

#### Viewing for Information or Companionship

These two concepts were measured by four indicators: 1) viewing for information, 2) a variable that measured the ratio of viewing for information to viewing for companionship, 3) viewing for companionship, and 4) viewing for para-social interaction (a sub-type of viewing for companionship). These will be explained below.

As a result of decisions made on the basis of the factor analysis, three questions were retained to measure the concept of viewing for information. These are shown in Table III.

TABLE III  
FACTOR SCORES OF ITEMS ON THE SCALE, "VIEWING FOR INFORMATION"

Loading	Variables
.73	You depend on TV to know what is going on in the world
.63	You watch TV as a way of getting information you need
.58	You rely on TV to get most of your news more often than you did seven to ten years ago

As can be seen, the wording of the items read: "You depend on television to know what is going on in the world" and "You watch TV as a way of getting information you need." The third question in this scale reads: "You rely on TV to get most of your news: 1) less often, 2) the same, 3) more often than you did seven to ten years ago." The mean of the scores for these three indicators was entered into the analysis.

The review of the literature on motives for television viewing, however, strongly demonstrated that the motives of viewing for news and information were inextricably enmeshed with the motives of viewing for isolation reduction and entertainment. Therefore, in order to isolate the information motive from the companionship motive, the variable, "viewing for information vs. viewing for companionship" (as a ratio of the motive of viewing for information to the motive of viewing for companionship) was measured according to the following rules:

If the score for the use of television for information was less than or equal to two, and the score on the use of television as a companion was greater than or equal to three, then "information" equalled one.

If the score on the use of television for information was less than or equal to two, and the score on the use of television for companionship was greater than two and less than three, then "information" equalled two.

If the score on the use of television for information was greater than two and less than three while the score on the use of television for companionship was greater than or equal to three, then "information" also equalled two.

If the score on the use of television for information was less than or equal to two while the score on the use of television for companionship was less than or equal to two, then "information" equalled three.

If the score on the use of television for information was greater than two and less than three while the score on the use of television for companionship was greater than two and less than three, then "information" also equalled three.

If the score on the use of television for information was greater than or equal to three and the score on the use of television for companionship was greater than or equal to three, then "information" also equalled three.

If the score on the use of television for information was greater than two and less than three and the score on the use of television for companionship was less than or equal to two, then "information" equalled four.

If the score for the use of television for information was greater than or equal to three and the score on the use of television for companionship was greater than two but less than three, then "information" also equalled four.

If the score on the use of television for information was greater than or equal to three and the score on the use of television for companionship was less than or equal to two, then "information" equalled five.

Viewing for companionship was measured by a scale of three questions and one separate indicator. The first two questions in the scale contained the four point response scale: "never," "rarely," "often," and "always."

As can be seen, the wording of the items making up this scale read: "TV keeps you company. It makes the house seem less empty" and "Television helps you to feel less lonely." The third question in this scale read: "You leave the TV set on to keep you company: 1) less often, 2) the same, 3) more often than you did seven to ten years ago" (see Table IV). The mean of the scores for these three indicators was entered into the analysis.

TABLE IV  
FACTOR SCORES OF ITEMS ON THE SCALE, "VIEWING FOR COMPANIONSHIP"

Loading	Variables
.60	TV keeps you company. It makes the house seem less empty
.54	Television helps you to feel less lonely
.73	You leave the set on to keep you company more than you did seven to ten years ago

An additional question, not included as part of the scale but retained as a separate indicator to measure the use of television for companionship read: "You watch certain shows because the TV personality (newscaster, talk-show host, evangelist, soap opera character) seems like an old friend." This question was meant to search out the presence of para-social interaction. It did not load with the companionship items on the factor analysis but split-loaded on a number of factors with no discernible pattern. Nevertheless, it was judged to be a valid and important indicator of the motive of using television for companionship. This question was therefore removed from the scale and used as a separate indicator. Thus, two separate indicators were established for the theoretical concept of viewing for companionship. These were: the three questions in the scale and the question on para-social interaction.

### Hours of Viewing and Discrimination

The total number of hours viewed per week was the variable entered into the statistical analysis to measure the concept of amount of viewing. It was a composite total based on answers to five questions dealing with hours of viewing. The calculation of the scale was described earlier.

The variables intended to measure discriminatory viewing did not load on the same factor in the factor analysis, indicating that they did not have much in common with one another. Nevertheless, it was the judgment of the researcher that individually, they were still good indicators of discriminatory viewing. They were, therefore, retained as three separate indicators of the theoretical concept, "degree to which television viewing is discriminatory." The response format for the three questions used to determine the degree of discrimination used in television viewing consisted of Likert-type scales reading: "You select a program from the TV Guide," "There are things on TV you don't like," and "You watch a show because it follows a program you have been viewing on the same channel."

A fourth variable, with the same answering format, read: "You flip channels to see what else will catch your attention" was deleted from the analysis. This decision was based partly on the results of the factor analysis, which showed this variable to load on three factors having little to do with discriminatory viewing. In addition, the researcher had received so many requests for clarification of the meaning of this question during the data collection that it was feared that many of the subjects had not understood it sufficiently.



### Other Variables Deleted from the Analysis

Two variables were deleted from the scales because of unsatisfactory frequency distributions. The first was a question related to the viewing of religious broadcasting and the second was a measure of the availability of transportation facilities. Because these variables had been considered important indicators of the theoretical concepts of the study, they are briefly discussed below.

Watching religious programs for information or spiritual comfort was to have been an indicator of using television for information while watching religious programming for entertainment was to have been included in the motive of watching for companionship. Of the 363 respondents who attested to viewing religious broadcasting, 93 percent answered that they did so for spiritual comfort and information (Table V). This variable was consequently deleted from the study on the basis of its highly skewed distribution.

Another important variable deleted on the basis of its frequency distribution pertained to the degree to which transportation was problematic to the respondent. The availability of a means of transportation is a crucial factor in the ease with which an elderly person can enjoy social activities. It also impacts on morale (Cutler, 1972, 1975). A question asking how much of a problem it was to arrange for transportation was, therefore, slated to be used as one important indicator of the theoretical concept "interpersonal interaction." The frequency distribution, however, ruled out the use of this indicator. The results were so skewed as to render any analysis impossible (see Table VI).

TABLE V  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR QUESTIONS RELATED  
TO WATCHING RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING\*

Classification/Value	Frequency	Percent
Total watching religious programming	363	79.0
Reasons for watching programming		
1. Watch for information or spiritual comfort	338	93.1 <sup>a.</sup>
2. Watch for entertainment	25	6.9 <sup>a.</sup>

\* Mean = 1.1; median = 1.0; mode = 1.0; s.d. = 0.50; n = 459

a. Percent of those who watch religious programming

TABLE VI  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR LIKERT-TYPE AGREEMENT QUESTION: "HOW  
MUCH OF A PROBLEM IS IT TO ARRANGE FOR TRANSPORTATION?"\*

Classification/Value	Frequency	Percent
1. No problem at all	331	75
2. Somewhat of a problem	76	17
3. A very serious problem: Sometimes I don't go out for that reason	35	8

\* Mean = 2.7; median = 3.0; mode = 3.0; s.d. = 0.62; n = 442

As can be seen in Table VI, seventy-five percent of the sample replied that transportation was "no problem at all," 17.2 percent indicated that it was "somewhat of a problem," and only eight percent of the sample considered it a "very great problem" that kept them from going out at times.

A larger percentage finding transportation a serious enough problem to impede their activity had been expected since these respondents lived in a large metropolitan area, which boasted neither public transportation facilities nor any special arrangements for senior citizens' transportation. Variables pertaining to transportation were therefore deleted from the scale designed to measure degree of interpersonal interaction.

#### Correlational Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlations were calculated to describe the degree of association among all of the variables and theoretical concepts as well as the directions of these associations. This was presented in the form of a correlation matrix (see Table XXI).

#### Handling of Missing Values

Missing values were handled differently for different procedures. The Pearson correlation executed a "pairwise" deletion of missing values, whereby any case with a missing value for one member of a pair of variables was deleted for that specific correlation, but not from the total correlation analysis (Nie et al., 1983). In other words, each correlation coefficient was computed using cases with complete data on that pair of variables regardless of whether the case had missing values

on other variable pairings in the variable list. In this fashion, the maximum number of cases were included in the analysis. It is a consequence of this method, however, that specific correlation coefficients are based on a varying number of cases (ranging from  $n = 398$  to  $n = 459$ ).

For a missing value in the Purpose in Life Test, the mean of the other four items for that case was substituted for the missing item. This effectively maximized the sample size by retaining as many cases for this critical scale as possible. It should be remembered that the questionnaires that evoked suspicion that the respondents had not understood the instructions for the scales had already been removed before the statistical analysis was performed. These included those questionnaires that contained many missing values or total omission of the Purpose in Life Test. As a result, those questionnaires remaining in the study contained relatively few missing values for this concept (three percent for question one, one percent for question two, one and one-half percent for questions three and five respectively, and two percent for question four).

### Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine several theoretical variables impacting on elderly persons' television viewing habits. These variables were social context of the older person as measured by degree of interpersonal interaction engaged in, the older person's attitudinal stance toward this social context as measured by questions from the Purpose in Life Test, and the impact of this subjective measure on older people's television viewing habits: whether television was

viewed primarily for information or primarily for companionship, quantity of viewing, and the degree to which such viewing was discriminatory. The instrument was initially a 103 item questionnaire, which, after being pilot tested, was factor analyzed and reduced to 53 items.

Subjects for the study were members of the AARP and patrons of the Salvation Army congregate meal centers for senior citizens. Questionnaires were distributed to the AARP groups at their monthly meetings and returned by mail. The patrons of the Salvation Army congregate meal centers completed the questionnaires in the centers and handed them back to the researcher. Of the 244 questionnaires distributed at the AARP meetings, 207 or 80 percent were returned. A lower proportion of the congregate meal patrons accepted questionnaires. However, of those who accepted questionnaires, 100 percent were returned. Three questionnaires from the AARP and 47 questionnaires from the congregate meal group were judged unusable, leaving a total of 459 responses for the study. Except for Black females, minority groups were poorly represented in this sample. Frequency breakdowns of the sample into several demographic categories revealed that variations among them were too minimal to necessitate separate analysis of any of the subgroups. Consequently, the entire sample was analyzed as a unit.

The returned questionnaires were factor analyzed for final confirmation of the scales. Frequency distributions were examined and, lastly, Pearson correlations were performed to establish relationships among the theoretical concepts of this study. The findings will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The present study was designed to discover how the concrete social situations and the subjective definitions of those situations influenced the television viewing behaviors of older Americans. Chapter Four will present a demographic description of the study's respondents. Quantitative and qualitative measures of the degree of interpersonal interaction will be presented as descriptors of their concrete social situations. Purpose in life scores will represent the respondents' subjective definitions of their situations. Television viewing behaviors will be described by motives for viewing, quantity of viewing, and measures of the degree of discrimination used in viewing. Presentation of frequencies on these theoretical concepts will be followed by descriptions of bivariate and partial Pearson correlations.

#### Demographic Description of Sample

There were 459 respondents in the study: 255 from the Salvation Army Congregate Meal Centers and 204 from the American Association of Retired Persons. As is the case with most gerontological samples, the women greatly outnumbered the men (see Table VII). Only 23 percent were male while 77 percent were female. Their ages ranged from 55 to 94 years, with a mean of 73.3. The mode was 76 years. The sample was also overwhelmingly White. Whites comprised 89 percent, Blacks nine percent,

and Native Americans 2.4 percent of the sample. Fifty-one percent of the respondents were widowed and 13.7 percent divorced or separated. Another 2.4 percent had never been married, and 33.3 percent were currently married. The proportion of those divorced was somewhat higher than the national figure which was reported to be 4.2 percent for females and 3.1 percent for males (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986). Note, however, that comparison with census statistics, which are based on all Americans who are 65 or over, can offer only a very approximate comparison. The study sample may have had a higher mean age, since it was recruited in senior citizen organizations frequented largely by people over 70.

Table VII also indicates that the sample was largely retired. Two and one-half percent were employed full time and 5.6 percent worked part-time. Nine percent described themselves as housewives and the remainder, 83 percent, were retired. The mean educational level of this group was having completed high school. Sixteen percent had a grade school education or less, 55 percent had completed high school and 29 percent had at least a college education. The reported education level was considerably higher than that reported nationally for this age group. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1986) lists over 35 percent as having eight years or less of education, no more than thirty percent completing high school, and less than ten percent having completed college. Again, this difference may reflect a bias in the sample resulting from the manner in which it was recruited.

White collar work was the mode in former occupation. Thirteen percent of the sample had been maintenance workers such as maids or janitors, nineteen percent were former blue collar workers, 42 percent

TABLE VII  
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Variable	Classification	f	%
Gender (n = 455)	Male	105	23.1
	Female	350	76.9
Age (n = 444)	55 to 64	52	11.7
	65 to 74	201	45.3
	75 to 84	150	33.8
	85 to 94	41	9.2
Race (n = 4599)	White	407	88.7
	Black	39	8.5
	Native American	11	2.4
	Other	2	0.4
Marital Status (n = 453)	Never Married	11	2.4
	Married	151	33.3
	Divorced/Separated	62	13.7
	Widowed	229	50.6
Work Status (n = 445)	Employed Full-time	11	2.5
	Employed Part-time	25	5.6
	Full-time Homemaker	40	9.0
	Retired	369	82.9
Level of Education (n = 447)	Grade School	72	16.1
	High School	244	54.6
	College or Beyond	131	29.3
Former Occupation (n = 391)	Maintenance	50	12.8
	Blue Collar	75	19.2
	White Collar	164	41.9
	Professional	56	14.3
	Homemaker	43	11.0
	Other	3	0.8
Living Arrangement (n = 452)	Living Alone	271	60.0
	Living with Others	181	40.0
Type of Domicile (n = 448)	Own Home	334	74.6
	Rent a Room	5	1.1
	Child/Relative's Home	12	2.7
	Retirement Home/Village	96	21.4
	Other	1	0.2



white collar workers and fourteen percent professionals. As stated earlier, there was not enough variation among any subgroups of this sample to warrant examining them individually.

The majority of respondents lived alone in their own homes. Sixty percent reported living alone, while 40 percent lived with at least one other person. The married couples comprised most of this latter group. The vast majority, 75 percent, lived in their own homes or individual apartments. One percent rented a room in a hotel or someone else's home, slightly less than three percent lived in a child's or other relative's home, and 24.4 percent lived in senior citizens' apartments.

In an effort to avoid treading on sensitivities, respondents were not asked to report their incomes. Instead, six rather broad categories of income were listed and subjects were requested to circle the appropriate category. Moreover, it was carefully explained that the questionnaires were anonymous. Despite these precautions, 58 or 13 percent declined to answer. A few wrote messages in the margins indicating that they found this question obtrusive.

Results showed the mean and median incomes for the whole sample as falling into the range between \$10,000 and \$15,000 (data not in tabular form). The mode however, was the range between \$5,000 and \$10,000.). AARP members had a slightly higher mean income than the Salvation Army patrons. Married couples had the highest incomes of all with males trailing them closely. Both of these subgroups fell into the \$15,000 to \$20,000 categories. Females had lower incomes than males and all of the "old old" (age 75 and over) showed decrements in income when compared with the "young old" (55 to 74 years). The greatest disparity of all was shown to be between Whites and Blacks; the income for Blacks falling

low in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 category. Those living in senior citizen apartments were only very slightly higher than the Blacks. This reflected the fact that there was a maximum income limitation for admission to this type of housing.

National figures are similar to the current findings. The mean income for males aged 55 to 64 is reported to be \$22,765. This figure, however, may reflect a large proportion of working men in this age group. The mean income of males who are over 65 drops to \$9,766. Mean incomes for females are similar to the study sample. They are reported to average high in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 category for the 55 to 64 year age group and drop to a low level of that category, after 65 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986).

### Statistical Findings

The previous chapter has discussed the variables that were deleted from the scales on the basis of their factor loadings and frequency distributions. This section of the present chapter reports the means and frequency distributions of the theoretical concepts and variables on the hypothesized causal chain (note, however, that causality can not be demonstrated with these data). This is followed by a description of the correlations among the variables and theoretical concepts in order of their positions on the hypothesized causal chain. Lastly, it discusses the remaining more indirect, or peripheral, relationships.

#### Univariate Frequency Distributions

The first conceptual variable in the hypothesized causal chain dealt with the degree of interpersonal interaction engaged in by the

respondents. There were two indicators of this concept. One was a scale measuring the frequency of interpersonal interaction described earlier, and the second was a more qualitative measure inquiring about the existence of a close personal relationship or confidant.

### Interpersonal Interaction

Table VIII reveals the range of all possible scores for the variable "interpersonal interaction" (4 to 16). The sample mean was 11.9 with a standard deviation of 1.9. The median was 12 and the mode was 12.

TABLE VIII  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION SCALE\*

Interpersonal Interaction Score	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
5	1	0.2	0.2
6	3	0.7	1.0
7	7	1.7	2.7
8	7	1.7	4.5
9	22	5.5	9.9
10	41	10.2	20.1
11	80	19.9	40.0
12	82	20.3	60.3
13	78	19.4	79.7
14	54	13.4	93.1
15	19	4.7	97.8
16	9	2.2	100.0

\* Mean = 11.9; median = 12; mode = 12; s.d. = 1.9; n = 403

The range of all possible scores for the separate single indicator of interpersonal interaction, confidant relationship, was 1 to 4 (Table IX). The mean was 2.9 with a standard deviation of one. The median was three and the mode was four.

TABLE IX  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR LIKERT-TYPE AGREEMENT QUESTION:  
"YOU HAVE SOMEONE TO CONFIDE IN..."\*

Classification/Value	Frequency	Percent
1. Never	48	11.0
2. Rarely	93	21.3
3. Often	136	31.2
4. Always	159	36.5

\* Mean = 2.9; median = 3.0; mode = 4.0; s.d. = 1; n = 436

As can be seen in Table IX, over two-thirds of the sample professed to having someone to confide in "often" or "always." Interpersonal interaction and the presence of a confidant were considered to influence the next conceptual variable, purpose in life as measured by five questions from the Purpose in Life Test.

### Purpose in Life Test

The Purpose in Life Test is an attitude scale constructed to measure the sense of meaning and the degree of perceived integration in one's existence. Table X presents its frequency distribution.

TABLE X  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR PURPOSE IN LIFE SCALE\*

Purpose in Life Score	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<11	0	.0	.0
12	2	.4	.4
13	1	.2	.7
14	0	.0	.7
15	2	.4	1.1
16	2	.4	1.5
17	5	1.1	2.6
18	7	1.5	4.2
19	3	.7	4.8
20	19	4.2	9.0
21	6	1.3	10.3
22	15	3.3	13.6
23	18	4.0	17.6
24	22	4.8	22.4
25	23	5.1	27.5
26	34	7.5	34.9
27	20	4.4	39.3
28	37	8.1	47.5
29	33	7.3	54.7
30	51	11.2	65.9
31	39	8.6	74.5
32	38	8.4	82.9
33	28	6.2	89.0
34	15	3.3	92.3
35	35	7.7	100.0

\* Mean = 28.02; median = 29; mode = 30; s.d. = 4.8; n = 455

As discussed earlier, this study chose only five questions from the Purpose in Life Test. All possible scores ranged from 5 to 35. The mean for this sample was 28.02, the median 29 and the mode 30. Thus the scores were skewed heavily toward the right indicating a high degree of meaning and purpose in life (Table X).

The cutting point at which a high purpose in life is indicated has been identified as 113 by the test's authors (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969). Elderly retired populations have been found to score relatively high on purpose in life (Acuff & Allen, 1960; Acuff & Gorman, 1968; Bynum, Cooper & Acuff, 1978; Harrison, 1983; Varna Garis, 1977). Since the whole Purpose in Life Test was not used in this study, it was not possible to make comparisons with former studies on elderly populations. The scores on the present study however, were skewed to the right in a commensurate fashion, indicating some similarity in results to those of former studies on the elderly.

Purpose in Life scores were hypothesized to influence the ways in which television was used. The next four variables on the causal chain were, therefore, "the degree to which television is used for information," "the ratio of viewing for information vs. companionship," "the degree to which television is used for companionship," and "the degree to which television is viewed in order to engage in para-social interaction.

### Viewing Motives

As described in the previous chapter, there were two variables measuring the motive of viewing for information: "viewing for information" and "information vs companionship." The range of all

possible scores for the variable of viewing for information was 1 to 5 (Table XI). The mean score was 2.8 with a standard deviation of 0.59. The mean was slightly above the neutral value of 2.5.

TABLE XI  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR INFORMATION SCALE\*

Information Score	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
1.00	5	1.1	1.1
1.33	6	1.3	2.4
1.67	14	3.1	5.5
2.00	43	9.4	14.8
2.33	48	10.5	25.3
2.50	8	1.7	27.1
2.67	97	21.2	48.3
3.00	113	24.7	72.9
3.33	62	13.5	86.5
3.50	8	1.7	88.2
3.67	51	11.1	99.3
4.00	3	0.7	100.0

a. Mean = 2.8; median = 3.0; mode = 3.0; s.d. = 0.59; n = 458

Table XII illustrates the findings for the motive of viewing for information vs. viewing for companionship. The range of all possible scores was 1 to 5 (5 indicating a high information motive -- see Table XII).

TABLE XII  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR INFORMATION VS. COMPANIONSHIP\*

Information vs. Companionship score	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
1.00	9	2.0	2.0
2.00	63	13.8	15.8
3.00	230	50.3	66.1
4.00	108	23.6	89.7
5.00	47	10.3	100.0

a. Mean = 3.3; median = 3.0; mode = 3.0; s.d. = 0.89; high = information motive; n = 457

The range of all possible scores for the concept "use of television for companionship" was 1 to 4 (Table XIII). The mean for using television for companionship was 2.6 with a standard deviation of 0.76. The median score was 2.7 and the mode was 3.0. The middle or neutral value for this variable was 2.5.



TABLE XIII  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR COMPANIONSHIP SCALE\*

Companionship Score	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
1.00	24	5.2	5.2
1.33	18	3.9	9.2
1.50	1	0.2	9.4
1.67	38	8.3	17.7
2.00	58	12.7	30.3
2.33	59	12.9	43.2
2.50	2	0.4	43.7
2.67	71	15.5	59.2
3.00	79	17.2	76.4
3.33	47	10.3	86.7
3.50	3	0.7	87.3
3.67	50	10.9	98.3
4.00	8	1.7	100.0

\* Mean = 2.6; median = 2.7; mode = 3.0; s.d. = 0.76; n = 458

A second and separate indicator of viewing television for the companionship motive was viewing for the purpose of engaging in parasocial interaction. As can be seen in Table XIV, the range of all possible scores on this variable was 1 to 4. The mean for this motive

was 2.7 with a standard deviation of .94. The sample scored somewhat higher on this indicator of viewing for companionship than they did on the companionship scale described above. The motive for viewing television was hypothesized to reflect on the number of hours spent watching television and on the degree to which this viewing was discriminatory.

TABLE XIV

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR LIKERT-TYPE AGREEMENT QUESTION:  
 "YOU WATCH CERTAIN SHOWS BECAUSE THE TELEVISION  
 PERSONALITY SEEMS LIKE AN OLD FRIEND"\*

Classification/Value	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
1. Never	69	15.6	15.6
2. Rarely	79	17.9	33.6
3. Often	218	49.4	83.0
4. Always	75	17.0	100.0

a. Mean = 2.7; median = 3.0; mode = 3.0; s.d. = 0.94; n = 441

#### Hours of Television Viewing

The mean number of hours for television viewing for this sample was 37.4 hours per week with a standard deviation 18.7 (Table XV). The degree of variation for this variable was very great, ranging from 1 to

131 hours per week. The respondent who reported viewing 131 hours per week explained in the margin of the questionnaire that she left the set on almost all of the time to discourage burglars.

Extant studies of this age group, using self-reports, report means of 21 to 37.1 hours of viewing per week (Anderson, 1984; Doolittle, 1979; Rubin & Rubin, 1982b; Schalinski, 1968). One exception was Davis's AARP sample who reported viewing five hours or less per week (Davis, 1971). Davis expressed doubts about the accuracy of these self-reports, pointing out that the Nielsen National Survey of December, 1969 reported that the average weekly viewing hours for people over 50 was 26.52 hours for men and 33.33 for women.

Actual viewing hours are believed to be substantially higher than self-reports. Schalinski's (1968) sample of elderly people in a retirement home, for example, indicated on their questionnaires that they watched television for an average of 3.56 hours per day; but when he verbally questioned them on the actual programs they viewed each day their viewing hours for the day averaged 4.27 hours. Related to the quantity of viewing was the qualitative factor: The degree to which viewing was discriminatory.

#### Degree to Which Viewing Was Discriminatory

As described in the previous chapter, the concept of discriminatory viewing was measured by three separate indicators: using a TV guide, watching because the program followed another one had been previously watching on the same channel, and a third question gleaned a dimension of passivity in television viewing. This question asked to what degree television showed programming that they did not like.

TABLE XV  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR WEEKLY HOURS OF TELEVISION VIEWING\*

Hours of Viewing	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
1 to 5	1	0.2	0.2
6 to 10	5	1.2	1.4
11 to 15	24	5.8	7.2
16 to 20	28	6.7	13.9
21 to 25	52	12.5	26.4
26 to 30	59	14.1	40.5
31 to 35	52	12.5	53.0
36 to 40	64	15.3	68.3
41 to 45	27	6.5	74.8
46 to 50	28	6.7	81.5
51 to 55	18	4.3	85.8
56 to 60	14	3.4	89.2
61 to 65	11	2.6	91.8
66 to 70	12	2.9	94.7
71 to 75	3	0.7	95.4
76 to 80	4	1.0	96.4
81 to 85	7	1.7	98.1
86 to 90	2	0.5	98.6
91 to 95	1	0.2	98.8
96 and above	5	1.2	100.0

\* Mean = 37.4; median = 34; mode = 36; s.d. = 18.7; n = 417

Table XVI shows that the range of all possible scores for each of these three questions was 1 to 4. The mean for using the TV Guide was 2.7 with a standard deviation of 1.1. The mean for watching a program simply because it followed a program one was watching previously on the same channel was 2.2 with a standard deviation of 0.9. The mean for the question asking to what extent television showed programs they did not like was 3.1 with a standard deviation of .69. The median and the mode for this question was three, indicating a somewhat high degree of dissatisfaction with television offerings. Findings on this question indicated that 256 respondents, or 58.4 percent of the sample, found themselves "often" disliking television offerings and an additional 127 or 29 percent disliked television offerings "always." This response appears to indicate a good deal less passivity toward the medium than has been reported by other studies of this age group (Davis, 1972; Kubey, 1978; Schalinski, 1968).

#### Correlations on the Theoretical Chain

The first link on the hypothesized theoretical chain consists of zero-order correlations between measures of interpersonal interaction and scores on the Purpose in Life Test. As described earlier, causation cannot be proven with these data. Correlations merely show the degree to which one variable co-varies with a second variable.

There were two indicators of interpersonal interaction employed in this study: the first was a scale measuring the quantitative aspects of interpersonal interaction and the second was a single question on the availability of a confidant (see Figure 5).

TABLE XVI  
 FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR LIKERT-TYPE AGREEMENT QUESTIONS  
 MEASURING DEGREE TO WHICH VIEWING IS DISCRIMINATORY

Classification/Value	Frequency	Percent
How often do you use the TV guide? a.		
1. Never	97	22.1
2. Rarely	56	12.8
3. Often	172	39.2
4. Always	114	26.0
How often do you watch a program because it follows one you have been watching on the same channel? b.		
1. Never	101	23.1
2. Rarely	169	38.6
3. Often	129	29.5
4. Always	39	8.9
How often do you see things on television that you don't like? c.		
1. Never	11	2.5
2. Rarely	44	10.0
3. Often	256	58.4
4. Always	127	29.0

a. Mean = 2.7; median = 3.0; mode = 3.0; sd = 1.1; n = 439

b. Mean = 2.8; median = 3.0; mode = 3.0; sd = 0.9; n = 438

c. Mean = 3.1; median = 3.0; mode = 3.0; sd = 0.7; n = 438

As can be seen in Table XVII, the hypothesis of a positive relationship between these concepts and purpose in life was upheld. There was a positive significant relationship between levels of interpersonal interaction and purpose in life scores ( $r = .38$ ) and a positive and statistically significant relationship between having a confidant relationship and purpose in life scores ( $r = .32$ ). These results conform to the generally accepted principle that the level of interpersonal interaction is a basic contributor to subjective well-being in old age. Many social gerontologists further propose that it is the quality of, or degree of intimacy in, such interaction that has the greatest effect (Arling, 1976; Birren, 1969; Blau, 1981; Cohen & Rajowski, 1982; Connor, Powers, & Bultena, 1979; Lowenthal & Haven, 1968; Strain & Chappel, 1982; Ward, Sherman, & LaGory, 1984). However, Harrison (1983) who, unlike the others, used the Purpose in Life Test as a measure of subjective well-being in her sample of elderly women, found having many friends to be a better predictor of a high purpose in life than having a few close relationships. The findings in this study indicate that, for these respondents, quantitative measures of interpersonal interaction and the qualitative measure of having a confidant relationship are both salient predictors of high purpose in life.

The next links on the hypothesized theoretical chain were between Purpose in Life scores and motives for viewing television. It was hypothesized that there would be positive correlations between the Purpose in Life Test and each of the two indicators of viewing for information: "viewing for information" and the variable measuring the ratio of "viewing for information versus companionship" (Table XVII).

TABLE XVII  
BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES OF  
INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION AND PRESENCE OF A CONFIDANT  
AND DEPENDENT VARIABLE, PURPOSE IN LIFE

Independent Variables	Purpose in Life
Engaging in Interpersonal Interaction	.38 ***
Having a confidant	.32 ***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

A negative relationship was hypothesized between purpose in life and each of the two variables measuring use of television for companionship: the scale labelled, "viewing for companionship" and viewing for the purpose of engaging in "parasocial interaction" with television personalities (see Figure 5).

Table XVIII reveals no statistically significant relationships between Purpose in Life and either of the information variables. The hypotheses of positive correlations between Purpose in Life scores and the two information variables were not upheld. The hypotheses of negative correlations between scores on the Purpose in Life Test and the two measures of viewing for companionship were upheld. There was a statistically significant correlation between scores on the Purpose in Life Test and the scale of indicators measuring the concept of viewing for companionship ( $r = -.10$ ). Likewise, there was a statistically



significant relationship between scores on the Purpose in Life Test and the variable depicting viewing to engage in parasocial interaction ( $r = -.10$ ).

TABLE XVIII  
BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS AMONG PURPOSE IN LIFE, INFORMATION,  
COMPANIONSHIP, INFORMATION VS. COMPANIONSHIP,  
AND PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION

Dependent variables	Correlation Coefficient
Viewing for information	-.05
Information vs. companionship	-.01
Viewing for companionship	-.10 *
Parasocial interaction	-.10 *

\*  $p < .05$

Since there have been no studies comparing motives for television viewing with the concept of purpose in life, it is not possible to make comparisons among these findings and those of extant studies on television viewing behavior. One study of television viewing behavior of the elderly gave exactly the same definitions of viewing for information and viewing for companionship as the current study, but used the Life Satisfaction Index to measure respondents' subjective states. Results showed that viewing for information was pervasive and unrelated

to any concrete life situation variables or to the Life Satisfaction Index score. Those who scored lowest on the Life Satisfaction Index, however, used television more for companionship regardless of the degree of social interaction or economic security (Rubin & Rubin, 1982b).

The next segments on the hypothesized theoretical chain sought to link motives for viewing television with quantitative and qualitative descriptors of viewing behavior (see Figure 5). The quantitative variable was operationalized as hours of television viewing. Viewing for information was hypothesized to be negatively related to hours of viewing while viewing for companionship was hypothesized to be positively related to hours of viewing.

Findings showed each of the two measures of viewing for information to behave differently (see Table XIX). The scale of items measuring viewing for information was positively correlated with hours of viewing instead of negatively as hypothesized ( $r = .22$ ). Thus, the hypothesis must be rejected. However, this correlation was logical and does not necessarily contradict the theoretical concepts of this study. The review of the literature has explained the inseparability of the information and companionship motives for viewing television by describing how news programs are viewed for the purposes of isolation reduction and engaging in parasocial interaction with the television newscaster.

Bogart (1980) described how television news media broadcasts are packaged for entertainment and newscasters carefully selected for traits that will encourage para-social interaction. As a result, it is difficult to determine the extent to which viewers watch news for information or for companionship. Bogart states that the

interrelationship between these two viewing motives is best demonstrated by the fact that older individuals who watch a large amount of television in general are also well above average in the time they spend watching the news. Comstock (1980) made a similar inference about the population as a whole, stating that, although the news is presented for information, it is packaged to serve as a means of companionship.

TABLE XIX  
BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MOTIVES FOR  
VIEWING AND HOURS OF VIEWING

Viewing Motives	Correlation Coefficient
For information	.22 ***
Information vs. companionship	-.14 *
For companionship	.38 ***
For parasocial interaction	.16 ***

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Any program in which a single figure is on camera most of the time, giving the viewer a sense of "knowing" the performer, facilitates a perception of intimacy between viewer and performer. This may be a partial explanation for the importance of news broadcasts to the elderly

audience (Davis, 1972). Levy (1978) found that one-half of his sample of New York state adults identified so closely with the television newscaster that they empathized with him when he made a mistake and missed him when he was on vacation and being replaced by someone else.

This intertwining of motives is clearly demonstrated in this study by a strong positive correlation between viewing for information and viewing for companionship ( $r = .42$   $p < .001$ ). There was also a positive correlation between viewing for information and engaging in parasocial interaction ( $r = .31$   $p < .001$ ). It, therefore, makes conceptual sense that the information variable might behave similarly to the companionship variable.

The second measure of viewing for information "information vs. companionship" was a variable in which the information motive had been isolated from the companionship motive and extracted out. It consisted of the ratio of the motive of viewing for information to the motive of viewing for companionship and was therefore, a more pure measure of the information motive. This contention was corroborated by the negative correlation between the conceptual variables "information vs. companionship" and viewing for companionship ( $r = -.55$   $p < .001$ ). As hypothesized, information vs. companionship was negatively correlated with hours of viewing ( $r = -.14$   $p < .05$ ).

The two measures of viewing for companionship, the scale of questions measuring the companionship motive and the separate indicator of viewing for parasocial interaction were positively correlated with hours of viewing as hypothesized ( $r = .38$ ; see TABLE XIX). Previous studies of television viewing behavior of the elderly population agree with the findings that viewing television for companionship is

associated with a high quantity of viewing (Davis, 1971; Rubin & Rubin, 1982b; Wenner, 1976).

A final segment of the theoretical chain compared motives for viewing with qualitative measures of viewing behavior. This was investigated by comparing viewing motives with three separate measures of discriminatory viewing (see TABLE XX).

TABLE XX  
BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MOTIVES FOR VIEWING  
AND VARIABLES MEASURING VIEWING DISCRIMINATION

Motives for viewing TV	Discrimination Variables		
	Uses TV Guide	"Follow"	Lack of passivity
For information	.00	.17 ***	.05
Information vs. companionship	.01	-.07	.02
For companionship	-.03	.25 ***	.04
For parasocial interaction	.05	.29 ***	.09 *

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

The first measure of discrimination was a question that asked the respondents how often they used the TV Guide in selecting programs to

view. The second question asked the respondents how often they viewed a program because it followed a program they had been watching on the same channel ("follow"). The third question solicited criticisms of television offerings by asking, "How often do you see things on television that you don't like?" A high score on this question was taken as an indication of a lack of passivity toward the medium.

The motive for viewing for information which, as discussed above, was highly correlated with the motive of viewing for companionship, showed a positive correlation of .17 with "follow." The pure information variable, "information vs. companionship" showed no significant relationships with any of the discriminatory variables. However, the two companionship variables showed statistically significant correlations in the hypothesized directions for the discriminatory variable "follow." There was a positive correlation between viewing for companionship and "follow" ( $r = .25$ ) and a significant positive correlation between para-social interaction and "follow" ( $r = .29$ ).

The only variable correlated with using the TV Guide was parasocial interaction. Although this is a companionship variable, and was therefore hypothesized to be negatively related to the variables depicting discriminatory viewing, its positive relationship to using the TV Guide may make conceptual sense. Frank and Greenberg (1980) found that the older people in their samples did more planning of their television viewing because of their greater need for surrogate friendships. These researchers pointed out that parasocial relationships with media personalities required continued exposure, therefore necessitating a degree of planning.

In summary, then, several of the hypothesized links along the theoretical chain were upheld by the findings of this study (see Figure 6). There were positive and significant correlations between both measures of interpersonal interaction and the purpose in life scores. There were modest but statistically significant relationships between purpose in life and the two companionship variables: viewing for companionship and para-social interaction. There were also modest but statistically significant correlations between the two measures of viewing for companionship and hours of viewing. The pure measure of viewing for information, however, showed no relationship with purpose in life, hours of viewing, or any of the variables designating discrimination in viewing behavior.

#### Peripheral Correlations

There were a few statistically significant correlations among variables that were not consecutively placed on the hypothesized theoretical chain. For example, Table XXI reveals that the variable, "interpersonal interaction" was positively correlated with having a confidant ( $r = .32$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and negatively correlated with hours of viewing ( $r = -.14$ ;  $p < .01$ ). It was positively correlated with two of the three descriptors of discriminatory viewing: lack of passivity toward the medium ( $r = .23$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and using the TV Guide ( $r = .14$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Having a confidant was positively correlated with engaging in parasocial interaction ( $r = .14$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and lack of passivity toward the medium ( $r = .19$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Purpose in Life showed weak but statistically significant relationships with the quantitative descriptor and one of the

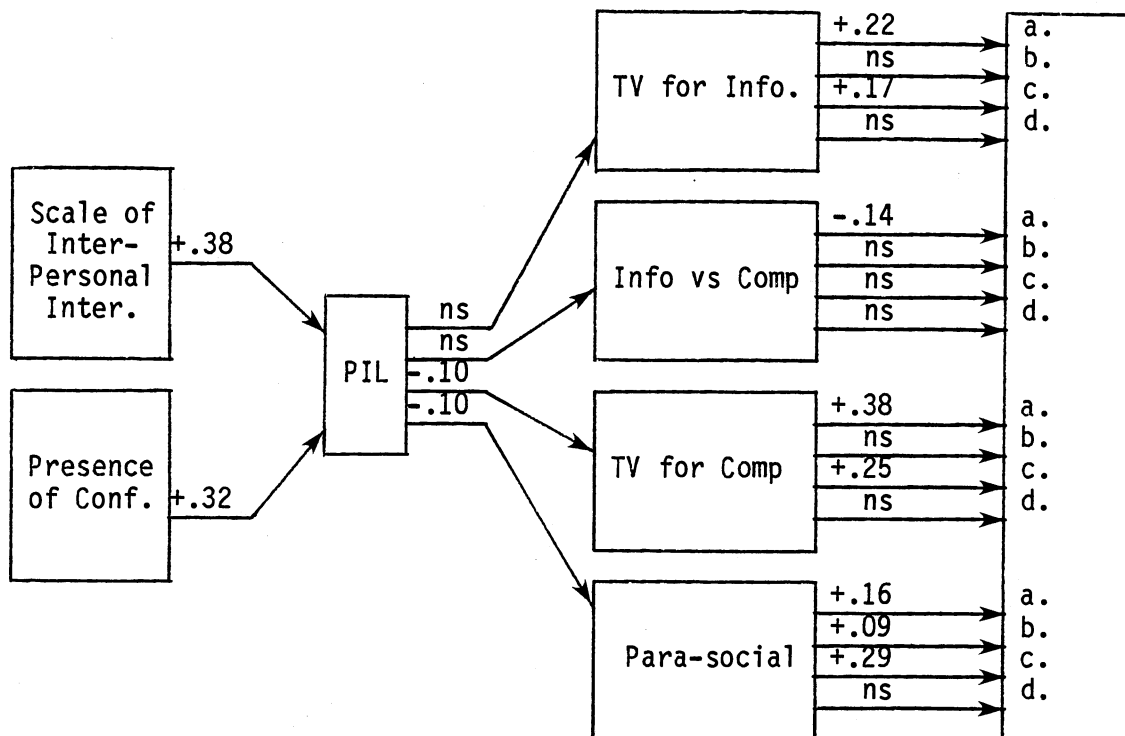


Figure 6. Hypotheses at Level IV Showing Correlation Outcomes

- a. Number of hours viewed
- b. Discrimination: TV Guide
- c. Discrimination: "Follow"
- d. Discrimination: Non-passivity

qualitative descriptors of viewing behavior. There was a negative correlation between purpose in life and hours of viewing ( $r = -.08$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Purpose in life also showed a weak negative correlation with the discrimination measure, "you watch a show because it follows a program you have been viewing on the same channel" ( $r = -.10$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

There was a positive correlation between hours of viewing and using the TV Guide ( $r = .17$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Hours of viewing was also positively



TABLE XXI  
BIVARIATE CORRELATION MATRIX FOR ALL VARIABLES

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Interpers. Interaction										
2 Confidant Relation	c .35									
3 Purpose in Life	c .38	c .32								
4 Viewing for Info	.03	.02	-.05							
5 Info vs. Companion.	.06	-.00	-.01	c .38						
6 Para-social Inter.	-.01	b .14	a -.10	c .31	-.06					
7 Viewing for Comp.	.07	.01	b -.10	c .42	c -.55	c .33				
8 Hours of Viewing	b -.14	.02	a -.08	c .22	b -.14	c .16	c .39			
9 Discr. Non- passivity	c .23	c .19	-.01	-.00	.01	.05	-.03	.02		
10 Discr. "Follow"	-.02	-.07	a -.10	c -.17	.07	c -.29	c -.25	b -.12	.00	
11 Discr. TV Guide	b .14	.07	.06	.05	a .02	.09	c .04	.17	.04	.02

a.  $p < .05$   
b.  $p < .01$   
c.  $p < .001$

correlated with viewing a program because it followed a show one had been watching on the same channel ( $r = .12$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

The companionship variable, "parasocial interaction" was positively correlated with scores on the viewing for information scale ( $r = .31$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and scores on the viewing for companionship scale ( $r = .33$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The conceptual logic of these relationships has been discussed above. The variable of parasocial interaction, however, was not significantly correlated with the pure measure of viewing for information vs. companionship.

There were also a few significant correlations between the conceptual variable and certain demographic characteristics. Purpose in life was positively correlated with income ( $r = .14$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The variable of information vs. companionship was positively correlated with income ( $r = .09$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and negatively correlated with age ( $r = -.12$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and education ( $r = -.12$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Using television for companionship was negatively correlated with both education ( $r = -.12$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and income ( $r = -.18$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Hours of viewing was negatively correlated with age ( $r = -.11$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Most studies of television viewing behavior of the elderly have, in fact, found that the quantity of viewing decreases somewhat among the very old (Comstock et al., 1978; Harris & Associates, 1975). Hours of viewing was also negatively correlated with education ( $r = .08$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and negatively correlated with income ( $r = -.11$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the demographic findings on the sample of respondents. Frequency distributions of all variables and indicators

used in the study were then discussed. This was followed by a description of relationships among the variables consecutively situated along the hypothesized theoretical chain. Relationships among variables that were not consecutively situated on the hypothesized theoretical chain were then examined. Finally, some incidental correlations such as those dealing with age, income, or education were reported.

The following chapter will discuss the conclusions drawn from these findings and some resulting recommendations. Another section of the following chapter will report stated preferences of television content of elderly viewers as expressed by the respondents of this study (the secondary objective of the study).

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The elderly population has been found to devote more time to viewing television than to any other activity. Television could therefore function as a salient tool with which to improve the quality of life for this group. Such application of this popular medium of communication would require substantial knowledge of the television viewing behavior of older Americans. The current research offers a theoretically based study integrating several aspects of the older person's concrete and subjective environments with resulting television viewing behavior.

Situationalism, a derivation of symbolic interaction theory and the conceptual framework of this study, has been reviewed in Chapter II. This was followed by an introduction of the conceptual variables, the causal relationships among them, and concomitant reviews of the literature at each of three levels of abstraction.

Chapter III, the methodology chapter, described the operationalization and instrumentation of the study. Findings in quantitative terms were presented in Chapter IV. These included: 1) a demographical description of the study sample, 2) results of the frequency distributions of the theoretical variables in the study, and 3) Pearson product moment correlations among the conceptual variables in the theoretical propositions.

The present chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the limitations of the research and a summary of the quantitative findings of the study. It will then discuss the secondary objective of the study, which had a twofold purpose: 1) to learn more about the older population's viewing preferences and 2) to explore some possible types of service that could be offered to the elderly via the medium of television. Lastly, recommendations for future research and actions on behalf of older Americans will be offered.

#### Limitations of the study

One major limitation of the study is inherent in the lack of representativeness of the sample. The sample was restricted to participants of AARP meetings and Salvation Army Senior Centers. Even within this group, respondents were somewhat self-selected, particularly in the Salvation Army Centers. Studies outlined in the review of the literature have indicated that those attending senior citizens groups may be a select group enjoying better health and higher morale than many of their age cohorts.

In addition, a certain amount of response bias may be inherent in surveys done on elderly respondents. Younger respondents' subjective descriptions of their situations have been found to be more consistent with their concrete conditions, while old people's subjective descriptions of their life situations have tended to be more optimistic about negative situations. When finding themselves in a situation that is both unpleasant and irreversible, the elderly tend to alter their perception of that situation. This tendency in the elderly may be indicative of ego defense by reduction of cognitive differences (Carp &

Carp, 1981). Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick (1986) have noted such behavior in octogenarians when they looked back over their lives and described their marriages. The purpose in life questions may have been vulnerable to such response bias.

### Discussion of Findings

The elderly respondents of this study, who were generally mobile and actively engaged in activities outside the home, were heavy consumers of television. Frequency distributions of the conceptual variables showed the group to have a uniformly high sense of meaning and purpose in life. This finding, coupled with previous studies (outlined in Chapters II and III), may indicate that a high sense of meaning and purpose in life is related to life stage. Indeed, old age is a time of deep introspection when the old person searches for life's transcendent meaning. Accomplishing this task would result in a perception of meaning and purpose in life. At this stage of life, older people also develop an increasing concern for the world and its inhabitants (Erikson et al., 1986).

The data demonstrated that this sample tended to divide into two categories: one that viewed mainly for companionship and one that did not. The groups that viewed mainly for companionship may have also been viewing a great deal of information content for the purpose of isolation reduction. Although these respondents viewed television for both companionship and information, the information motive had a somewhat higher frequency. Those who viewed mainly for companionship viewed a greater quantity of television than those who did not and were also less discriminating in program selection.

An indicator of their lack of discrimination in viewing was their generally low score in passivity toward the medium. Passivity toward television offerings is a function of great dependence on the medium and subsequent lack of discrimination in viewing. Neither those who watched for companionship nor those who did not were shown to be passive viewers. In fact, these respondents showed a very critical stance toward television offerings. This finding is a departure from previous studies of older Americans' television behavior (Adams & Groen, 1974; Bower, 1973; Kubey, 1978, 1980; Schalinski, 1968). Davis (1972) described his California sample, which was very demographically similar to that of the current study, as a happy and satisfied television audience. There may be two possible explanations for this difference. The first is that, although some of the other studies were done on samples that were demographically similar to that of the current study, none have included respondents from the same geographical area of the country as the one in which the current study was conducted. The second, and more likely, explanation may be that, in the years that have ensued between former studies and the current one, there has been a change in television content. Some of the perennial favorites of older Americans have been terminated by the networks and the nature of their replacements have evoked a great deal of distaste by this age cohort.

In examining the television viewing behavior of the sample, a theoretical chain of the conceptual variables was established (see Figure 4). Pearson correlations were calculated to establish the predictive value of each of these (although causation, per se, could not be evaluated). The objective measures of the social situation were the level of interpersonal interaction and the extent to which a close

personal relationship, or confidant, was available. These measures were positively associated with purpose in life (see Figure 6).

Past research (detailed in Chapter II) has been unable to establish any relationship between specific subjective factors and motives for television viewing. It was hypothesized in the current study, nevertheless, that the more global and generic measure, purpose in life, would be related to television viewing behavior. Purpose in life was not found to be associated with the motives of viewing for information in this study. These findings, coupled with the findings of past studies of the older population's viewing behaviors, appear to indicate that television viewing for serious content and information is pervasive among older individuals regardless of any environmental or subjective factors in their lives. In fact, the preference of the elderly for serious media content actually predates the advent of television. Before television sets were widely available, Schramm and White (1949) found that, with increased age, the newspaper was used less for entertainment and more for information and serious commentaries on public affairs. It is possible, then, that viewing for serious content and information is simply related to life stage.

However, there were modest negative associations between purpose in life and both viewing for companionship and viewing for para-social interaction. Apparently, those with a greater perceived purpose in life have less need to employ television as a surrogate companion (and vice versa).

The next links along the hypothesized theoretical chain predicted relationships between motives for viewing and both quantity of, and discrimination in, television viewing. The pure motive of viewing for



information was related to the quantity of viewing but not to discrimination in viewing choice. However, viewing for information (contaminated with viewing for companionship), viewing for companionship, and para-social interaction were all significantly related to number of hours viewed and the discrimination variable, "follow." Para-social interaction also produced a small association with the use of the TV guide as a discrimination measure.

Although not part of the hypotheses tested, several additional correlations were found. There was a positive correlation between having a confidant and engaging in para-social interaction. It is possible that an existing idiosyncratic personality trait acts as an antecedent variable to both the tendency to have close personal relationships and the tendency to form close para-social relationships with television personalities. However, any explanation of this relationship, other than pure conjecture, would require further research.

There were also positive correlations between the independent variables of interpersonal interaction and presence of a confidant and the dependent variable of passivity toward television. Having a high purpose in life was not associated with either information variable, but was related to both companionship variables. It was also modestly correlated with hours of viewing and the indicator of discriminatory viewing, "follow." Those with a higher purpose in life, therefore, viewed slightly fewer hours and were inclined to be more more discriminatory. These correlations, however, were not as strong as those involving the concrete social situation (interpersonal interaction and availability of a confidant).

The concrete social situation of the sample members appeared to have greater bearing on television viewing behavior than the subjective concept, "definition of the situation." Those who engaged in more interpersonal interaction or had confidant relationships viewed less television and were more discriminating viewers.

#### Secondary Objective of the Study

As mentioned in Chapter I, a secondary objective of the study was to learn more about the kind of programming preferred by older Americans and how television could better enhance their quality of life. More specifically, it sought to identify the types of programs that would: 1) serve as informational links between the aging person and the community, 2) offer entertainment that was appropriate to the tastes and needs of this age group, and 3) offer help in adapting to this final and sometimes difficult stage of the life cycle.

Desired television programming may be partly a function of life stage or it may be partly a function of life-long preferences. It is important and beneficial to the very old to have access to television programming that offers them a thread of continuity over the many stages of their long life cycles, and some affirmation of their life-long value systems. Abrupt cancellations of such programs without commensurate replacement has often been the rule rather than the exception, impeding older viewers' efforts to achieve a sense of integrity and further disengaging them from the mainstream of the culture.

Such programming decisions on the part of the networks have been economic in nature. The networks are penalized for shows attracting audiences that are largely elderly. For example, according to 1980

figures, sponsors paid the networks four dollars per thousand viewers who were over 60 and 12 dollars per thousand viewers whose ages ranged from 18 to 49 years. Thus, even if a show attracted a large number of viewers, it was expedient for the network to cancel that show if those viewers were over 60 (Davis & Kubey, 1982; Kubey, 1980). Because of the importance of television in the lives of older Americans, it would be beneficial to reverse such practices.

### Types of Programming

In order to learn more about programming preferred and desired by older Americans, a section was incorporated into the questionnaire that listed eight categories of television programming not currently available on the regular networks. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in each of these categories. Responses are shown in Table XXII and discussed below. Supplementing this report of the frequency distribution will be verbatim comments from the respondents themselves. Respondents wrote comments in the margins throughout the questionnaires and on the back page, which was reserved for that purpose. In fact, out of 459 respondents, almost one-half (223) took advantage of the invitation to write in additional comments. As will be seen below, many were quite colorful and emotional.

### Information Related to Older Americans

This category received the largest affirmative response of all the suggested categories of programming. This response was anticipated. The current generation of older Americans have had little experience

TABLE XXII

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR LIKERT-TYPE AGREEMENT QUESTION: "HOW INTERESTED WOULD YOU BE IN THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF SHOWS"

Type of Program	Very Much	Some What	Not Much	Not At All
Information related to older Americans (health, social security, consumer affairs, medicare, community programs)	65.6	27.2	5.3	1.9
Religious programs (including worship services for shut-ins)	53.4	26.5	12.1	8.1
Music of the twenties, thirties, and forties (jazz, ragtime, big band, and show music)	57.6	22.5	11.1	8.9
Classical music	28.0	27.0	21.9	23.2
Reruns of older quality programs (detective shows like Perry Mason, variety shows like Ed Sullivan and Lawrence Welk)	57.7	23.9	12.3	6.1
Documentaries or dramas about older Americans	43.8	32.0	16.1	8.1
Classic movies	36.9	25.7	20.3	17.1
Mental health discussions for older Americans	55.0	25.3	13.2	6.4

until now with government bureaus and "officialdom." Aging individuals, however, now find their lives enmeshed with the bureaucratic system.

Today's older generation must understand laws and government

regulations concerning such matters as taxes, Social Security, wills, power of attorney, guardianship, civil rights, and available government and community service agencies. Television is the most accessible link between the older person and the bureaucratic system.

In one experimental media program, older viewers were invited to phone in questions in their areas of greatest concern. The response was very great and requests for information on economic matters were predominant. Inquiries about Social Security focused mainly on entitlement. The economic aspects of Medicare were also emphasized as were requests for public programs on Medicare. Very apparent in this experiment was a lack of knowledge about where to turn for advice (Brody & Brody, 1970).

Many elderly need help that may be available in the community but they are often unaware of its availability. If put to such use, television could serve as the most viable link between the older persons and existing community services. The Public Broadcasting Service program, "Over Easy" has been shown to create increased awareness of community services among its elderly viewers. It has also served as an impetus to political activities on behalf of the elderly population (Davis & Kubey, 1982). Television may also be the most effective medium for dissemination of specific messages concerning the health of elderly viewers (McAbee & Cafferty, 1982). One respondent in the current study put this idea very well when she suggested:

Keep seniors informed and up-to-date on legislation and other interesting benefits at local, state, and national levels; e.g., home loans, repairs, weatherization, help with energy bills, distribution of commodities (cheese and butter, etc.), transportation, entertainment, activities, recreation, etc.

Putting Mexican American elderly in touch with existing community services has been especially problematic. Print media has been ineffective because even those who speak English may not be proficient enough to read it. Spotting information in Spanish might be an effective solution (Carp, 1970).

### Religious Programs

Religious programming was the only category of programs among this group that was already available on the networks. As already indicated, this programming was very popular among the respondents of the current study:

It's my only means of church. I watch only Channel 14 (religious programming) -- nothing else.

I like religious programming. I use it for church on Sunday.

This question was included for the purpose of learning whether those who could not get to church would appreciate viewing regular church services of their own denominations via television. The question, however, may not have furnished this information, partly because of its wording and partly because none of the respondents were shut-ins. Some of the Black respondents expressed a desire that Black gospel singers be included in these programs.

### Music Programming

Of all the suggested programming, classical music elicited the lowest level of interest. Music of the twenties, thirties, and forties,

however, received an enthusiastic response. Many, on their own volition, underlined "big band music" or indicated in the margins that they would be especially happy to have such entertainment. Some volunteered such comments as, "I love it." Many expressed their distaste for contemporary popular music. This was consistent with Davis (1972) who found that his elderly sample enjoyed musical shows when the music was familiar and disliked the music that was new and different. As one viewer put it:

I like the older music like Glen Miller. When I was young, I went to tap dancing school. My mother was 90 when she died. She knew every person's name on the "Lawrence Welk" show.

Another respondent lamented:

Every time there is a good program on and you get to know and like it, they say the rating is low and take it off -- like "Lawrence Welk" and "Ed Sullivan."

#### Reruns of Old Programs

The affirmative response on the question dealing with rerunning older, popular programming was second only to the response to the question on information. Many of these comments were quite emotional:

Please bring back the reruns of the old shows. Some of these shows on the air now are a disgrace to our country.

Although respondents were not asked to specify favorite programs, many of them did so on their own volition. Most underlined "Lawrence Welk" or put notations in the margin indicating their enthusiasm for this show. Many others designated "Perry Mason" along with "Lawrence Welk." A number of respondents wrote Bob Hope's name in

the margin. "The Waltons" and "Little House on the Prairie" were also frequently mentioned. A few wrote messages at the end of the questionnaire such as, "I sure hope you can get these programs back for us." The pages at the ends of the questionnaires were filled with negative comments about the newer shows. The following two comments represent the feelings of many of the sample:

Most secular TV is geared for younger people. We need TV that will interest older people, very badly. We watch more TV than younger people. It's sometimes all we have for company.

The TV shows available today are mostly trash. Soap operas are not fit to watch. They have taken away most of the sitcoms and comedy shows, westerns and musicals that I used to enjoy.

These respondents echoed those of every study done on older American's viewing preferences. "Lawrence Welk" has been found to be a universal favorite of elderly audiences in every study since 1960, when Hoar conducted the first definitive study on the subject. "The Waltons" (particularly the grandparents on the show), Bob Hope, and "Perry Mason" have been longtime favorites as well (Adams & Groen, 1974; Davis, 1972; Harris & Associates, 1975; Kubey, 1980; Schalinski, 1968).

The fact that these favorite television personalities are all members of the respondents' age cohort is significant for a number of reasons. Seeing their own value systems reflected on television helps older people to retain the feeling that they are part of the social milieu. There are fewer and fewer television personalities and shows that do so. For the same reason, the elderly react very favorably to seeing performers of their own age.



It seems likely that a great deal of parasocial interaction is taking place between the aging person and these favorite performers. That would be consistent with Ellis et al. (1983) who proposed that viewers take the role of a media personality who they perceive as familiar and salient. Indeed, Schalinski's (1968) description of how his elderly subjects interacted with "Lawrence Welk" and attributed their own values to him has already been described in the review of literature. This phenomenon was also encountered in a report of a recent survey of the subjects of the California Guidance Study. In personal interviews, octogenarians described how they used respected and long familiar members of their own age cohort as role models to aid in adjusting to this difficult period of life. On occasion, a media figure was selected for this purpose. For example, one of the men in this study had selected Bob Hope for this purpose:

"He has amassed a fortune. He married and stayed with the same wife for many years. He has been wonderfully unselfish in his trips to Vietnam. We are nearly the same age and I look to his life as a standard for my own" (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986, p. 59).

Except for occasional appearances on specials, these favorite performers of the elderly are now rarely seen on the regular networks. The back page of the questionnaires were filled with complaints about current programs. Many expressed anger and disgust. Schalinski (1968), too, had found real concern among his elderly subjects when their favorite shows were eliminated.

#### Documentaries and Dramas About Older Americans

A somewhat lower number of respondents indicated that they would be

interested in such programming. This category constituted one of the lower responses. No comments were volunteered about this category of programming.

### Classic Movies

Classic movies received the second lowest affirmative response of all the categories of programming. Davis (1971) and Rubin and Rubin (1982) also found that movies were not a popular item with their elderly samples. One possible explanation may be that this age group does not prefer programs that demand so long an attention span.

### Mental Health Discussions

This category was ranked relatively high by the sample. Because some members of the study group had not understood the meaning of this question, the researcher explained verbally to each group of respondents that it meant, "helpful discussions about such problems as feeling depressed." That the same respondents who attested to having such a high sense of meaning or purpose in life should also desire helpful discussions about feeling depressed is not as great a contradiction as it may seem, however. Old age is fraught with difficulty even for the most optimistic and stout-hearted. These aging people work toward meaning and purpose in life while enduring disintegration of physical capacities. Their future is limited and they think about death. Erikson et al. (1986) explained how they arrange their lives to shut out these thoughts and assume positive attitudes. They work to counterbalance despair. Some elements of despair, however, are always present and have to be dealt with. One respondent articulately

encapsulated Erikson et al.'s theory with these words:

Sometimes I feel empty, bored, unneeded. Depression comes to all who are not afraid to admit it, [although] many days are exciting and you feel worthwhile. At 74, you can't deny death any long. It must be faced. We need love and to be told we have done the best we could with what we had to do with. We need to be needed ... Can't a program be slanted to educate [our children] of their importance to their mother in her on-going years? When we are young, we read everything we can find to help us be better mothers. They (like me at middle-age) need to aware that the need to be loved never ends. Let TV help us all deal with family life from birth to death with love.

#### Other Respondent Comments

In addition to illustrating the discussion of types of programming, the respondents' comments portrayed other issues and concerns as well. Probably the most salient issue for these elderly Americans was the presentation of explicit sexual behavior on television. Summarized one respondent:

I near to liked it better when people used to kiss standing up.

All but seven of the comments offered some degree of complaint about the problem of sexuality portrayed on television. Nearly all of these complaints were coupled with expressions of concern for the generation of children being socialized on this fare. Many stated that they would not watch television if their grandchildren were visiting. Wrote one woman:

We would like a lot cleaner programs -- less naked women and less sex and filth on TV. I turn off TV when my grandchildren visit. No wonder our children are so violent and mixed up in their minds. They have been raised on filth.

The sentiment most expressed in these comments was embarrassment. These elderly people stated that they felt embarrassed and uncomfortable when watching television with other people in the room. They especially complained about obscenity, vulgar language, and commercials on feminine hygiene products.

I believe there is too much sex; also it is having too bad an effect on our young so they don't have good moral standards. Also, the use of sanitary napkins, douches, and such things are very embarrassing, especially with both males and females in the room. I really think this kind of show should be banned. Seems like, on all shows, there are people going to bed for sex. There is too much talk about living together without the benefit of marriage.

The perceptions of these respondents that explicit and "immoral" sex acts abounded on the networks were not unfounded. Cantor and Pingree (1983), in doing a content analysis, found that intimate sexual conduct had proliferated in the daytime serials in the 1970s on all the networks, presumably in order to entice viewers. Physically intimate behaviors also occurred one to three times per hour during prime time. As one respondent put it:

I would like very much to see less violence and sex on TV. Educational programs on those subjects are fine but they need to be presented in a clean, morally acceptable manner.

Another wrote:

I very much resent the representation of soap families as typical -- with incest, gays, sexual promiscuous, etc.

Sexual issues were not the only concern of the older respondents, of course. Many made references to television as an important source of companionship. This concern, one of the primary interests behind the

current project, is illustrated by the words of one lonely widow who poignantly commented:

TV makes me feel that I am not alone. It's like you and I are having a conversation.

Another viewer expressed it simply:

I love good programs. They are a lot of company for us old people in the evening.

A third issue had to do with the physical limitations with which so many elderly are bound. There were many complaints about the rise in the volume of sound when commercials were being aired. This appeared to be jarring for the older viewer. Turning down the sound during the commercial necessitated getting up twice, once to turn the volume down and a second time to turn it up again in order to hear the regular program when it returned. It is noteworthy that Schalinski's elderly sample voiced the same complaint to him in 1968. In the seventeen years elapsing between these studies, nothing has changed. One respondent pointed out that people whose hearing was not sharp had difficulty in picking out the words of performers when background music played while the actor spoke.

One thing I find very annoying is having to listen to background music when people are talking. I'm sure anyone having a hearing problem is bothered with this, especially us senior citizens.

Some respondents complained about other presentation problems.

Wrote one viewer:

If anything is worth reading, why can't it be left on the

screen long enough to read it?

For one respondent, it was her physical limitations that proved to be the primary attraction of the medium:

I like TV because I can see better than I can read.

There were some affirmative comments about quiz programs, game shows, documentaries, and travelogues. Two such comments include:

We love the travelogues. We watch all evening because we like to make plans to travel. I wish they'd show more travelogues.

Let's have more travelogues. It would take years to have a half hour visit (or more) of all the interesting places in the United States and the world. Nine to ten AM would be a good time instead of "Phil Donahue" and some other drivel -- and soap operas (ugh!).

There were also special mentions of "Love Boat," "Little House on the Prairie," "The Waltons," and other specific programs. A few explained that they enjoyed watching television because it showed them parts of the world that they would never get to see. On the whole, positive comments regarding available shows dealt primarily with news, documentaries, weather reports, and religious programs.

As noted above, many of the respondents declined to write their opinions on the last page but voiced similar complaints orally to the researcher. These complaints were voiced in a vein of anger and appeared to be deeply felt. Many expressed cynicism regarding the potential of their opinions to bear any influence.

In summary, the elderly respondents in this study expressed great interest in information programs of all kinds and were very receptive to programs oriented toward elderly concerns. This did not necessarily

include the category, "documentaries and dramas about older Americans." They appeared to want concrete information about their day-to-day lives. Beyond that, they showed strong preferences for programming that reflected the style and value systems of their youth and strongly resented the replacement of such programming with "immoral" television shows. They expressed feelings of discomfort and embarrassment when viewing explicit sexual content and showed great concern for its effect on the current generation of children. They markedly enjoyed entertainers of their own age and several asked the researcher if she could do something to bring back the "Lawrence Welk Show."

#### Recommendations

In return for the privilege of using the airwaves, the Federal Communications Act of 1934 requires that a broadcasting station must act in the public's interest if it is to be granted a license (Davis & Kubey, 1982). Acting in the public interest includes a responsibility on the part of the networks to do research on the media needs of every segment of the American population in order to provide programming commensurate with the needs of each of these segments. Despite this ruling, less than one percent of all such research has been devoted to the needs and preferences of older Americans (Davis & Kubey, 1982; Kubey, 1980).

The Federal Communications Commission, which grants permission to the networks to use the airwaves and is responsible for enforcement of this law, has never imposed its will strongly on the networks (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, & Roberts, 1978; Comstock, 1980; Davis & Kubey, 1982). For this reason, and in view of the importance of television in the

lives of the elderly, advocacy groups may be necessary to advance the media needs of older Americans. Pressuring networks to conform to the rulings of the Federal Communications Act might afford substantial improvement in the network's posture toward its elderly audience. Such a change could be highly beneficial to young and old alike.

Television viewing behavior of the elderly may offer a fruitful area for Gerontological research. This study has suggested that media needs of older persons may be related to the developmental tasks of this stage of the life cycle. In symbolic interactionist terms, the "spiritual self" becomes dominant and this change is reflected in media preferences.

Gerontological theories like disengagement and substitution theory have not yielded much information beyond documenting the taste and preferences of older audiences. The current study has been unable to link the subjective definition of the situation or any demographic factors to the media behavior of the elderly. There is some evidence that the elderly may use television as a tool in adapting to this late lifestage. This suggests that investigations of television viewing needs of the elderly within a developmental framework might be promising.

The whole subject of therapeutic roles that television could play in the lives of older Americans could profitably be explored. Shut-ins and residents of nursing homes need to be included in this research.

The study of this area has been made all the more imperative by the promise of new technologies that will make it possible to beam television programming to micro audiences in the future. A few innovative experiments have already been conducted using two-way



interactive cable systems. These experiments have demonstrated that, at relatively low costs, television could allow house-bound elderly to visit with their neighbors, check up on each other, talk with local health care facilities, vote, renew driver's licenses, and so on. One such experiment in Reading, Pennsylvania even involved senior citizens in the operation of this two-way cable system. Some conducted Bingo games with shut-ins and some arranged for elderly viewers to talk with the mayor and members of the city council (Danowski & Hanneman, 1980; Marshall, 1976; Moss, 1978; Wallerstein, Marshall, Alexander, & Salzer, 1975).

In short, the potential held by television to improve the quality of life for the elderly is limited only by the human imagination. To realize this potential, a large body of knowledge will be needed. It will be necessary to integrate divergent research findings about the aging process and its relationship to the powerful medium of television, both in its present form, and in the yet unrealized forms that promise to evolve from future technology. It is a reasonable expectation that television will continue to play a prominent role in the lives of elderly Americans. It will be important for us to find out as much as possible about this important and complex relationship. As Montagu put it:

Indeed, television represents the most vital of all living miracles...for television has it in its power to be the instrument of far greater good than any device born of man's ingenuity, not excluding the invention of the printing press (1962, p. 126).

As with most studies of this nature, this research has generated more questions than it has answered. Future studies may be able to

overcome the limitations of the present work and elevate our understanding of television in the lives of older Americans to new heights. If the present study can inspire new theoretical and empirical efforts in this area, the time devoted to it will have been well spent indeed.

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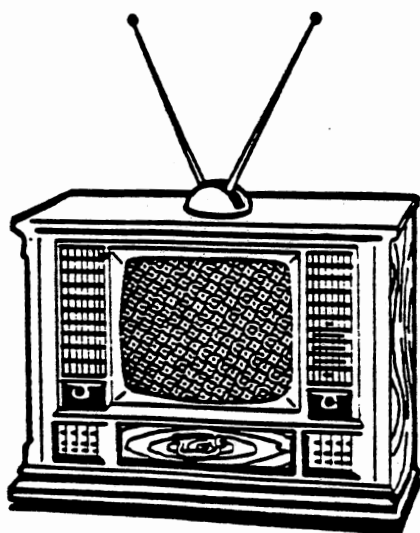
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## APPENDIX



**This Study has a dual purpose. Firstly, it is designed to help us understand the role played by television in the lives of older Americans. Secondly, we are interested in the development of a television channel for older audiences. We need your input on the kinds of television you would find useful and enjoyable.**

**Please answer all the questions in this booklet and feel free to add any comments you may have in the space allotted. We are extremely interested in your opinions and ideas on this subject. Thank you for your help.**



**Family Study Center  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, Oklahoma**

We would like to ask you about your opinions of television.

PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER TO  
THE LEFT OF THE CORRECT ANSWER

For example:  
Do you own a TV?  
1. YES  
2. NO

- 
1. Do you own a TV set that works? (Please circle number)
    1. YES
    2. NO
  2. How different are the TV needs of older Americans from those of any other age group? (Please circle number)
    1. VERY DIFFERENT
    2. SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT
    3. NOT AT ALL DIFFERENT
  3. Does TV serve the needs and interests of older Americans?
    1. YES
    2. SOMETIMES
    3. NO
  4. Why do you watch religious programs? (One answer only)
    1. I DON'T WATCH
    2. FOR SPIRITUAL COMFORT  
OR INFORMATION
    3. FOR ENTERTAINMENT
  5. If you want to go out, what do you do for transportation?
- 
6. How much of a problem is it to arrange for transportation?
    1. NONE
    2. SOMEWHAT OF A PROBLEM
    3. A VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM. SOMETIMES  
I DON'T GO OUT FOR THAT REASON.

7. We are interested in a TV channel for older Americans.  
How interested would you be in the following types of shows:

	VERY MUCH 4	SOME- WHAT 3	NOT MUCH 2	NOT AT ALL 1
a) INFORMATION RELATED TO OLDER AMERICANS (Health, Social Security, Consumer Affairs, Medicare, Community Programs)	4	3	2	1
b) RELIGIOUS PROGRAMS (including Worship Services for Shut-Ins)	4	3	2	1
c) MUSIC OF THE TWENTIES, THIRTIES AND FORTIES (Jazz, Ragtime, Big Band and Show Music)	4	3	2	1
d) CLASSICAL MUSIC	4	3	2	1
e) RERUNS OF OLDER QUALITY PROGRAMS (Detective shows like Perry Mason, Variety Shows like Ed Sullivan, Lawrence Welk)	4	3	2	1
f) DOCUMENTARIES or DRAMAS ABOUT OLDER AMERICANS	4	3	2	1
g) CLASSIC MOVIES	4	3	2	1
h) MENTAL HEALTH DISCUSSIONS FOR OLDER AMERICANS	4	3	2	1

8. Below are some situations that involve your day-to-day life or your TV viewing habits. Please tell us how often each occurs by circling the number to the right.	NEVER	RARELY	OFTEN	ALWAYS
	1	2	3	4
a) YOUR (OR YOUR SPOUSE'S) HEALTH KEEPS YOU FROM GOING OUT	1	2	3	4
b) YOU SELECT A PROGRAM FROM THE TV GUIDE	1	2	3	4
c) YOU VISIT WITH PEOPLE BY TELEPHONE	1	2	3	4
d) YOU VISIT WITH PEOPLE IN PERSON	1	2	3	4
e) YOU HAVE SOMEONE TO CONFIDE IN	1	2	3	4
f) YOU DEPEND ON TV TO KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE WORLD	1	2	3	4
g) THERE ARE THINGS ON TV YOU DON'T LIKE	1	2	3	4
h) YOU WATCH CERTAIN SHOWS BECAUSE THE TV PERSONALITY (Newscaster, Talk-Show Host, Evangelist, Soap Opera Character) SEEMS LIKE AN OLD FRIEND	1	2	3	4
i) YOU WATCH A SHOW BECAUSE IT FOLLOWS A PROGRAM YOU HAVE BEEN VIEWING ON THE SAME CHANNEL	1	2	3	4
j) YOU ARE INVOLVED IN ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE YOUR HOME	1	2	3	4
k) TV KEEPS YOU COMPANY. IT MAKES THE HOUSE SEEM LESS EMPTY	1	2	3	4
l) YOU FLIP CHANNELS TO SEE WHAT ELSE WILL CATCH YOUR ATTENTION	1	2	3	4
m) YOU WATCH TV AS A WAY OF GETTING INFORMATION YOU NEED	1	2	3	4
n) TELEVISION HELPS YOU TO FEEL LESS LONELY	1	2	3	4

For each of the following statements, circle the number that would be most nearly true for you. Note that the numbers always extend from one extreme feeling to its opposite kind of feeling. "Neutral" means no judgement either way; try to use this rating as little as possible.

---

1. My life is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
empty, filled only with despair			(neutral)	running over with exciting good things		

2. If I should die today, I would feel that my life has been:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
very worthwhile			(neutral)	completely worthless		

3. Facing my daily tasks is:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
a source of pleasure and satisfaction			(neutral)	a painful and boring experience		

4. I am usually:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely bored			(neutral)	exuberant, enthusiastic		

5. I have discovered:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
no mission or purpose in life			(neutral)	clear-cut goals and a satisfying life-purpose		

Now, we wish to learn more about what your life is like and how it has changed in the past seven to ten years. Please indicate whether the following situations occur for you more often, less often, or about the same as they did seven to ten years ago

	MORE OFTEN 3	THE SAME 2	LESS OFTEN 1
a) YOU LEAVE THE TV SET ON TO KEEP YOU COMPANY	3	2	1
b) YOU RELY ON TV TO GET MOST OF YOUR NEWS	3	2	1
c) YOU'RE INVOLVED IN ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE YOUR HOME	3	2	1
d) YOU VISIT WITH PEOPLE BY TELEPHONE	3	2	1
e) YOU VISIT PEOPLE IN PERSON	3	2	1

-----

How many hours do you watch?

- a) IN THE MORNING? \_\_\_\_\_ HOURS
- b) IN THE AFTERNOON? \_\_\_\_\_ HOURS
- c) IN THE EVENING? \_\_\_\_\_ HOURS
- d) ON A SATURDAY? \_\_\_\_\_ HOURS
- e) ON A SUNDAY? \_\_\_\_\_ HOURS

Lastly, we would like to ask you a few background questions which are needed for statistical purposes only.

---

1. What is your sex? (Please circle number)
  1. MALE
  2. FEMALE
  
2. What is your marital status? (Please circle number)
  1. NEVER MARRIED
  2. MARRIED
  3. DIVORCED OR SEPARATED
  4. WIDOWED
  
3. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Which is the highest level of education that you have completed?
  1. GRADE SCHOOL
  2. HIGH SCHOOL
  3. COLLEGE (OR BEYOND)
  
5. What is your race? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What is your approximate yearly income from all sources?
  1. \$0 to \$5,000
  2. \$5,000 to \$10,000
  3. \$10,000 to \$15,000
  4. \$15,000 to \$20,000
  5. \$20,000 to \$30,000
  6. \$30,000 or more

7. What is your current work status? (Please circle number)

1. EMPLOYED FULL TIME
2. EMPLOYED PART TIME
3. FULL TIME HOMEMAKER
4. RETIRED

8. What is your occupation? (If retired, what was your usual occupation before retirement?)

---

---

9. Who do you live with? (Please circle number)

1. ALONE
2. WITH A SPOUSE
3. WITH A CHILD OR GRANDCHILD
4. WITH A SISTER OR BROTHER
5. WITH A MALE FRIEND
6. WITH A FEMALE FRIEND
7. OTHER

10. What are your living arrangements? Do you .....

1. ... LIVE IN YOUR OWN HOUSE OR APARTMENT?
2. ... RENT A ROOM IN A HOTEL OR SOMEONE'S HOME?
3. ... LIVE IN A CHILD'S OR RELATIVE'S HOME?
4. ... LIVE IN A RETIREMENT HOME OR VILLAGE?
5. ... OTHER (Please specify)\_\_\_\_\_.



YOU HAVE NOW COMPLETED ALL OUR QUESTIONS.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE  
SUBJECT OF TELEVISION, PLEASE DO SO ON THIS PAGE.

WE ARE VERY INTERESTED IN YOUR IDEAS, PRAISES OR CRITICISMS.

2  
VITA

Marilyn M. Traub

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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