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The Lived Spiritual Experience of Aging Adults (≥ 65)

Eddie Doron Soffer
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Eddie Doron Soffer

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Lived Spiritual Experience of Aging Adults (≥ 65)

by

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AA, College of Southern Nevada, Las Vegas, 2013

BA, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived spiritual experience of aging adults (≥ 65), filling a gap in the literature relating to aging people's spirituality in a variety of circumstances. The once-American youth-oriented society is growing older at an unprecedented rate as 76 million individuals of the baby-boomer generation (born 1946–1964) face retirement age. This demographic shift highlights a social problem of millions of aging baby boomers requiring a far-reaching change in the structure of society. This qualitative study aimed to gain insights into the lived experience of the spirituality of a sample of nine adults aged 65 and above by asking the research question of how older people describe their lived spirituality experience and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey. The theoretical framework of the present study is based on two theories, transformative learning and gerotranscendence, which relate to shifting perspectives as individuals cope with the challenge of reconciling new realities and perspectives of aging with old perceptions characteristic of young age. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, and analysis strategies included phenomenological reduction and synthesis. The six major themes that emerged about spirituality across the interviews with older adults were (a) reframing self-identity, (b) reframing one's habitat, (c) connecting with inner values, (d) finding meaning and purpose, (e) mindfulness and acceptance, and (f) transcending materialism. The implications of an increasingly longer lifespan invite a paradigm shift in how individuals and communities approach the later stages of life. Addressing this social problem will result in positive social change.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The topic of this phenomenological exploration is the lived spiritual experience of older adults ages 65 and above. Underlying this topic is the urgent demand for high-level social responses caused by the population explosion of millions of baby boomers exacerbated by gains in longevity, prolonging the retirement period of this community. People need to adjust to having a longer life than any previous generation. As a concept, growing older will require a new definition that considers the unprecedented stage of life after midlife. These extra later years need new strategies, programs, and support. A greater understanding of the reorientation toward a perspective wherein life is experienced as a spiritual reality is necessary.

The topic of spirituality has powerful explanatory potential for helping understand internal thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that go into the experience of aging (Atchley, 2008). Investigating the lived spirituality experience of aging adults offers an opportunity to explore how a given set of spiritual beliefs and practices may impact how older adults live through their later years. Gerotranscendence theory states that from middle age on, spiritual maturity gradually increases, setting in a perspective shift from a materialistic and role-oriented life philosophy to a transcendental and spiritual orientation (Tornstam, 2005).

In this chapter, the author outlines the background and recent research related to the lived spiritual experience of the older adult and identifies a potential gap in the literature that needs to be addressed. The chapter includes the research questions, theoretical framework, and nature of the study. Definitions and assumptions of the work,

as well as the scope and limitations, are also addressed. Finally, the significance of the work is examined.

Background

Two converging dynamics, the baby boom and the rising life expectancy, reshape America into an older society. First, the baby boom between the mid to late 1940s and the late 1960s or early 1970s introduced a time of demographic resurgence in America and the world's developed countries, especially the ones participating in World War II. During this period, reproduction dynamics changed with marriage rates accelerating, total fertility rising, and the number of births substantially increasing. The baby boom interrupted the decades-long decline in birth rates dating back to the nineteenth century (Van Bavel & Reher, 2013).

The aging baby boomers are a cohort of the American population, approaching 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964, that began to turn 60 in 2006 (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004). The cohort of 65 has grown from approximately 3 million in 1900 to 35 million in 2000 (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004). The projection is for this number to reach 80 million by 2040 (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004). From a proportionality perspective, the American population over 65 was 4.1% in 1900, 12.4% in 2000, and is forecasted to be 20.4% by 2040 (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004). This estimated large group of older people is causing a significant shift in the demographics of the youth-oriented American society. The other dynamic, the rising life expectancy, emerges from Americans living longer. When the United States was formed, the average period a person may expect to live was

35; a century later, life expectancy had risen to 40 (Butler, 2008). Old age was initially defined by the Social Security Act of 1935, which established 65 to be the retirement age; however, life span has since changed (Butler, 2008).

In today's reality, as adults reach their retirement years, they can look forward to an additional 30 to 40 years of life (Butler, 2008). Now, it is the centenarians who are the fastest-growing age group. The later years of a population living longer will undoubtedly require new strategies, programs, and support from society. Unlike any previous generations, individuals must adapt to the concerns of an uncharted longer life ahead. As adults enter this unprecedented stage of life, the very concept of growing older is undergoing redefinition.

The composite of the number surge of older people and the higher life expectancy gives birth to challenges for society in general and older adults as individuals. Unlike in the past, many adults will have socially uncharted and unprecedented years between midlife and death. This extra time may either bring opportunities for growth, learning, and transformation or be spent in physical and mental impairment and loss (Butler, 2008).

Given the rapid pace of these transformations and the unique value society places on youth, additional challenges bordering on social problem proportions are inevitable. Although the literature review below shows that research into the spirituality of aging has flourished, most investigations have excluded the bulk of older persons who age successfully. The more significant part of the studies seems to have restricted their target population to those suffering from severe or chronic health conditions or living in nursing

homes or assisted living facilities (e.g., Agli et al., 2018; Bishop et al., 2006; Flood & Scharer, 2006; Jopp & Rott, 2006). Only a few researchers have investigated the experiences of healthy older adults living in the community.

There needs to be more literature regarding the spirituality of older people in various circumstances to address the gap (Lepherd et al., 2020; Rumbold, 2007). Unlike most previous studies, the target population of this research is healthy adults living in the community. Further, studies on spirituality and aging have primarily been limited to mainstream Christianity (Albanese, 2007; Ardel, 2003).

This study explores the lived spirituality experience of spirituality for individuals in “The Christian Community,” which sees itself as a Christian denomination but is not recognized as a Christian denomination by Christian churches. No research at all could be found on spirituality, aging, and The Christian Community, a gap that deserves attention, given the growing field of mind-body and the rapid aging of American society. Understanding the older person’s unique spiritual beliefs and practices might best be achieved through a process that involves exploring a person’s spirituality using their own words and clarifying where necessary in a discussion. Based on Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology provides a systematic approach to analyzing data about lived experiences. Eliminating the dualism between objectivity and subjectivity and aggregating the subjective experiences of several individuals allows the researcher to develop an objective “essence.”

The need for the current study arises from the urgency to provide social responses and a clearer understanding of the value of “spiritual elements” (i.e., spirituality) in health

and quality of life. “Patients and physicians have begun to realize the value of elements such as faith, hope, and compassion in the healing process” (World Health Organization, 1998). The reductionist or mechanistic view of people as a material body is no longer the norm, promoting research to move towards a more holistic view of health that includes a non-material (i.e., spiritual) dimension, emphasizing the seamless connections between mind and body. A more precise understanding of the meaning of the lived spirituality experience of aging people is needed.

Problem Statement

The social problem is society’s lack of know-how to adequately meet the spiritual needs of millions of aging baby boomers. This lack and a rising life expectancy necessitate many responses to meet these needs. The research will fill a gap in understanding how to develop such programs and support by investigating the lived spirituality experience of aged (≥ 65) members of The Christian Community. The quantum leap of life expectancy from 35 years at the establishment of the United States to 78.79 years has left baby boomers by the millions with an extra 30 to 40 years of life to live. As a result, a social problem is born that demands social responses. Growing older is a concept that is no longer what it used to be in previous generations. After midlife, the unexampled life span constitutes a shift in life-course trajectory and a new stage of life. Unlike any previous generations, individuals will have to face the uncharted waters of adapting to the concerns of a longer life, of life after midlife. Older adults have been established as a population that incorporates spirituality into daily living (Tornstam, 2003). Findings indicate that the role of spirituality, as people advance in age, becomes

increasingly recognized and that spiritual practices are associated with successful aging (Boswell et al., 2006; Moberg, 2008; Moremen, 2005; Wink & Dillon, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative exploration was to help create a society that supports aging with dignity and a spirit of well-being by gaining insights into the lived spirituality experience of aging adults as millions of baby boomers retiring each year from the U.S. labor force continue to face the unknown new challenges of prolonged life. For this study, the author employed Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology method to arrive at an in-depth, detailed exploration of the universal human phenomenon of spirituality, a significant and universal aspect of the human experience. While the specific content of spiritual belief, practice, and experience varies, all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred, or divine force (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Using purposive and snowballing sampling techniques to recruit members of The Christian Community with a high spirituality level, the researcher explored the lived spirituality experience of aging adults and its relevance to such aspects of their lives as health, well-being, and quality of life. The Christian Community is a religious movement that sees itself as a Christian denomination but is not recognized as a Christian denomination by Christian churches.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study was: How do older people describe their lived spirituality experience and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey? Embedded in this question are at least two other questions: (a) How do older adults who

live by the spiritual principles and practices of “The Christian Church” perceive their spiritual experience as they age? And (b) How do older adults experience their spirituality as they age? These research questions focus on the personal meaning of spirituality individuals have as they live through aging. The keywords in this research question provide insight into the nature of this study. The “how” question points to my open position of a lack of preconceived notions of what would be found in the collection and analysis of data. “Spiritual principles and practices” indicate the beliefs and patterns of behavior of members of a spiritual community. The qualifier “live by” signifies an immersion in spiritual practice that shapes each individual’s daily life. Next, “describe” implies that each participant in this study would interpret their specific lived spirituality through a personal lens. Finally, “spirituality experience” relates to the unique lived encounter with spirituality. The research question guided the exploration of how older adults’ spirituality interacts with how they experience their aging.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study explored the lived spiritual experience of aging adults by examining how individuals construct perspectives based on the lived spiritual experience. Among the theories that fit within the larger framework of the constructivist point of view and relate to the topic of this study are Jack Mezirow’s transformational (or transformative) learning theory (1991, 2000, 2003) and Lars Tornstam’s gerotranscendence theory (1997, 2000, 2005). These two theories provided a guiding orientation, reflected in the research and intensive interview questions. The transformational learning theory includes elements that can facilitate successful aging,

and the gerotranscendence idea offers insights into positive aging. Both of these theories are anchored in the process of shifting perspectives. The two together constitute a comprehensive means of studying the lived experience of the spirituality of aging adults.

Transformative learning, introduced by Mezirow (2000), takes place in five phases: (a) disorienting dilemma (a situation where a learner finds that what they thought or believed in the past may not be accurate) (Mezirow, 1978), (b) introspection (accompanied by fear, anger, guilt, or shame), (c) assessment (of one's assumptions), (d) realization (others share that one's discontent), and (e) searching for options (such as new roles and relationships). Thus, when faced with a disorienting dilemma, such as the signs of aging, individuals tend to examine long-held beliefs, such as ageism critically. Through similar self-examination, they shift their viewpoint to one that can accommodate the new circumstances they find themselves in.

Transformative learning is not simply a change in point of view. Instead, it encompasses an entirely different perception of what is possible (Mezirow, 1991). Such transformation implies an eye-opening "epistemological change" and not merely a change in "behavioral repertoire" (Kegan, 2000, p. 48). Kegan (2000) further described transformative learning as involving a change in one's frame of reference. This process implies that the individual goes beyond the passive absorption of the new information, actively examines the info, and scrutinizes the perspectives and biases of those who advocate the word.

A developmental theory of positive aging, Tornstam's (1997) theory of gerotranscendence posits that successful aging is a natural life-span process. Accordingly,

adults' development continues later in life to avoid being "trapped in the definitions" (p. 50), which they absorbed before they passed their middle years. The theory of gerotranscendence, like that of Mezirow's transformational learning theory, involves a significant transformation in perspective. As they advance in age, people gradually modify their fundamental conceptions and revise their definition of reality. The effect of this perspective alteration encompasses how individuals perceive themselves, their social relationships, and their ideas about the mysteries of life. In other words, gerotranscendence is "a shift in meta-perspective" (p. 3) from a view of the world that is worldly and pragmatic to one that is more cosmic and transcendent. This shift is generally backed by increased life satisfaction (Tornstam, 1997).

Tornstam (2005) contended that what defines successful aging is not the ability to continue midlife patterns through old age but to realize that "old age has its very own meaning and character" (p. 3). Tornstam emphasized that successful aging is about change, development, and transformation. The gerotranscendence process can be facilitated by a reduced preoccupation with the body, an alternative concept of time, and setting time for quiet reflection. The implications of the gerotranscendence theory for exploring older adults' lived spiritual experience are far-reaching and tie back to the constructivist viewpoint in terms of the aging adults' reconstruction of their views on life. The two theories, transformational learning, and gerotranscendence, form a two-way lens to examine the lived spiritual experiences of older adults in this study.

Nature of the Study

This study aimed to understand how lived spirituality shapes older adults' spiritual experience through their life journey after mid-life. Qualitative research explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems (Tenny, 2021). The most crucial point about qualitative research is that its practitioners seek to avoid generalizing their findings to a broader population (Austin, 2014). By providing a wide-ranging picture of the experience of the lived spirituality of older adults, qualitative research seeks more in-depth, free-form answers with sensitivity to the meanings people bring to their behavior (Mason, 2010).

To understand directly from those living the experience of spirituality and aging, the author used the transcendental phenomenology following procedures as Moustakas (1994) outlined. Transcendental phenomenology is conditional upon setting aside all preconceived ideas to view phenomena through cloudless lenses to allow the true meaning of phenomena to emerge naturally with and within their own identity (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology confronts the subject matter on its particular terms by emphasizing the bracketing out of preconceptions (Patton, 2015). This emphasis arises from the fundamental need to set aside researcher preconceptions and biases and look at data from various angles so that the research results reflect the experiences of study participants more accurately and thoroughly.

The researcher sought in this study to obtain an unbiased description of the raw data to be collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of subjective spirituality after mid-life using long-winded interviews supplemented by my

recorded self-reflections. Data analysis during and following the collection process included reduction, development of core themes, checking themes against original data collected, constructing individual textural descriptions, using imaginative variations to construct structural narratives, as well as a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience for the group of participants.

Researcher Bias

The role of the researcher is central to the study design in transcendental phenomenological studies in that the researcher is the primary data collection instrument, given the nature of qualitative research. It follows that the researcher's previously held assumptions, beliefs, and biases need to be openly delineated and isolated (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The subject of this study revolved around spirituality and aging. Jewish by birth, a Jewish spiritual background influenced me as a researcher. Being a member of the 65 and above population fueled my ever-growing commitment to understanding the spirituality of aging. This commitment includes my interest in designing and facilitating educational programs for older adults focusing on self-realization and living the joy of life. To help identify biases, I exercised vigilance in separating my experience from those of participants, especially in judging their descriptions based on my own experience. When such judgment occurred, I noted it and reflected on its origin while simultaneously redirecting my attention to gathering and understanding the data.

Moreover, specific steps had to be taken to guard against my assumptions and prejudices influencing the interpretation of data during the analysis stage. As outlined by

Moustakas, the systemic procedures and detailed data analysis steps are ideal to ensure that the researcher's background, beliefs, and assumptions would not contaminate the data in this study. The epoche process was pivotal to that end, designed to help me identify and set aside any biases preceding the data collection and analysis.

In addition to recognizing and recording my biases and assumptions throughout the study, I describe my background and openly identify my position on the lived spirituality experience and aging in Chapter 3. As a third measure, I kept lengthy and straightforward notes on my reactions, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings throughout the study.

Definition of Terms

Operational definitions provided below were used throughout this dissertation when these terms appeared. Additional terms related to the research method processes are defined in Chapter 3.

Ageism: A systematic prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination against people results in older people being treated with disdain, sarcasm, and abuse or rendered invisible by society only because they are old (Butler, 2008).

Anthroposophy: This is a formal educational, therapeutic, and creative system established by Rudolf Steiner, seeking to use mainly natural means to optimize physical and mental health and well-being.

Religion: An organized system of spiritual beliefs, values, and behaviors/rituals shared within the context of institutional structures, for example, a faith like Judaism or Christianity, and holding the beliefs of that faith as well as participating in the rituals and

activities associated with that faith (Moberg, 2005; Moremen, 2005; Nelson- Becker & Canda, 2008; Steger & Frazier, 2005).

Spirituality: A search, or communion with, the sacred to derive meaning and purpose (Pargament et al., 2013). This definition has become nearly universal among scientists in the study of spirituality and is reflected in approximately two thirds of studies on the topic (Kapusinski & Masters, 2010). Embedded in this definition are three core concepts – the sacred or the transcendent (beyond the ordinary), a connection or relationship with the sacred, and the search for ultimate meaning or purpose (Mayseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

Successful aging: In this study, this term refers to moving through the stages of life after age 65 in a state of being able to cope with changes, maintain close social relationships, remain relatively healthy, and experience spiritual connectedness or a sense of meaning and purpose in life; synonymous with positive aging (Carroll, 2007; Duay & Byran, 2006; Flood & Scharer, 2006; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Tornstam, 1994).

Subjective well-being: This is an indicator of successful aging that includes such elements as self-reported happiness, coherence, self-esteem, social support, self-confidence, and life satisfaction (Bishop et al., 2006; Pavot & Diener, 2004; Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006; Swift et al., 2008; Wiesmann & Hannich, 2008).

Zen Buddhism: This is a spiritual system for attaining enlightenment by the dissolution and transcendence of self, negating all desires and forms of self-centeredness.

Assumptions

The present phenomenological study did not make any assumptions about the study results. Still, it focused only on how the participants' expressions and the meanings of these expressions produced developing data and analysis (Patton, 2015). However, there were certain assumptions about recruitment and data collection for clarification. For example, it was assumed that the older participants in the present study would be truthful about their lived experiences regarding spirituality and aging. Further, they would be forthcoming as much as possible. They could recall and describe their lived spiritual experiences while aging and be honest about their spiritual practice. From the conceptual framework of this study, it was assumed that people construct their subjective reality, that the process of human development and change occurs naturally throughout adulthood, that physical signs of aging, such as wrinkles and sagging skin, and social signs of aging, such as retirement and loss of friends or partners, would fit Mezirow's (1991) definition of disorienting dilemmas.

Scope and Delimitations

The goal to better understand the lived spirituality experiences of the baby boomers' generation prompted the chosen qualitative phenomenological inquiry study design. This study's limitations and potential weaknesses stemmed from the nature of qualitative research, the participant sampling technique, the transcendental phenomenology method, and the available resources. The purposeful sampling of qualitative research reduced the generalizability of findings (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2015). The present study's sample population was participants aged 65 and above who

speak and understand English. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling (i.e., getting referrals for more participants from the older participants themselves) and word of mouth. Individuals who met the criteria and were not exposed to these recruitment methods could not be studied.

The results of this study cannot be generalized to the population of older adults. However, the findings can add meaningful information to the body of knowledge on spirituality and aging for this group. Participants may not have been candid about their spiritual practices. Some of the participants in this study may have exaggerated how they were engaged in spirituality, in which case, the data collected may have been compromised.

Limitations

The procedural steps of transcendental phenomenology represented still another limitation. They required considerable time to complete more study participants flawlessly, including pre-interview questionnaires and member checking to review interview transcriptions and verify study findings. They also required more effort on my part, such as repeating the epoche process before each interview and processing the collected data multiple times and in different ways. Further, there are differences between the study's sample of participants and the larger population of older adults. For example, the method used to interview participants limited the study since all interviews took place via telephone. There was no opportunity for the researcher to be in the participant's presence. Thus, the researcher was not exposed to the natural nonverbal information important in two-way communication. Although snowball sampling is adequate for hard-

to-reach populations, study participants tend to refer to people like themselves, compromising diversity (Tracy, 2013). Overall, due to the phenomenological method, reporting was possible on only a small group of participants. It follows that the results cannot be generalizable to the larger population.

Study Significance and Implications for Social Change

The spirituality of the population of baby boomers who are relatively healthy and live independently in the community is understudied. There are relatively few studies on spirituality and aging (e.g., Janhsen et al., 2019; Lucchetti & Lucchetti, 2014; MacKinlay, 2001; MacKinlay, 2006; MacKinlay, 2017; Seifert, 2002; Wink & Dillon, 2003). Most of the research conducted on aging has targeted either those residing in nursing homes or similar facilities (Dalby, 2006; Herron & Cavanaugh, 2005; Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003) or those with severe or chronic health conditions (Bishop et al., 2006; Flood & Scharer, 2006; Jopp & Rott, 2006). This study's significance lies in filling a gap in the literature to provide positive social change. Statistics reveal that adults nowadays live longer and can expect to live more years beyond the traditional retirement age of 65 than any previous generation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Understanding how baby boomers live through the additional years makes this study significant. It can ultimately guide practitioners to programs and interventions to improve their quality of life from a spiritual perspective.

The demographic changes mentioned have precipitated a need to solve challenges impacting tens of millions of adults ages 65 and above regarding the healthcare system, Social Security, housing, and the economy. Most adult populations do not work past

retirement and have fewer options for continued development. They typically have lower income levels, less healthcare access, and higher chronic health conditions risk. Studies suggest a positive association of spirituality and health behaviors with well-being, notably subjective well-being (Cohen & Koenig, 2003). However, the precise character of such relationships between all these constructs has yet to be discovered. A recent survey revealed significant associations between spirituality, health-related behaviors, and psychological well-being regarding the type of acquired education (Božek et al., 2020).

Access to spiritual practice is not dependent on income. If it can be established that incorporating spirituality into wellness practice (i.e., taking care of oneself) decreases the need for intervention by the health care system, promoting such practice across the aging population would be valuable. The outcoming positive social change may help release pressure on older adults' local and global health care delivery systems.

On the professional level, given the demographic changes in this country, there is a need for solutions to the challenges an aging society incurs. This social change would impact millions of aging adults on the healthcare system, Social Security, housing, and the economy. To contribute to these efforts, information that provides additional strategies for successful aging can add to the well-being and stability of society. The findings of this study will contribute to those strategies. This study contributes to positive social change by filling the mentioned gap in the literature.

Summary

In this chapter, the author sets forth the purpose of this qualitative study and identified the research question that would guide the research. The study explored the understudied topic of the lived spirituality experience of older adults to add to the body of research into the interplay between spirituality and aging. The participants were members of “The Christian Community,” a metaphysical spirituality that focuses on creating reality by changing one’s thoughts. By investigating the lived spirituality of people with such a belief system, the researcher expected to obtain information that can provide older adults with tools and knowledge to enhance their ability to age successfully.

In Chapter 2, the author discusses the literature as it relates to (a) the theoretical foundation of the study, (b) the context of spirituality and successful aging, (c) the research question of this study, and (d) the research method. I situate the study within the current body of knowledge on spirituality and aging through the literature review, further clarifying the key concepts used in this study, including spirituality and religion.

In Chapter 3, the author details the procedures followed in completing this qualitative phenomenological study of the lived spiritual experience of older adults in The Christian Community. That chapter includes descriptions of the course of selecting transcendental phenomenology over alternative methods, the research participants and sampling strategies, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis steps. The role of the researcher is clarified, and the measures to be taken to ensure scientific rigor are outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Researchers have proposed that later stages of adulthood lead to spiritual development, which is a predisposition to believe in something beyond the material universe and to explore the greater meaning of life and existence (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Kaopua et al., 2007; Leder, 1999; Moberg, 2005). This spirituality is especially relevant when older adults face changes in role status and identity, cope with an illness, deal with daily limitations, recover from a loss, and shift from a future orientation to a “here and now” focus (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Kaopua et al., 2007; Leder 1999; Moberg, 2005).

Although prior researchers have investigated the intersection of aging and spirituality of those in institutionalized settings, insufficient attention has been given to denominational variations among Christians (Blieszner & Ramsey, 2002). This study fills a gap in the literature regarding the lived experience of the spirituality of the aging in individual ages 65 and above in The Christian Community. This qualitative research aimed to gain insights into the lived experience of the spirituality of a sample of Americans aged 65 and above and its relevance to assisting them throughout their lives.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical foundation for this study, including a discussion of the transformational learning theory (Mezirow 1991, 2000, 2003) and the gerotranscendence idea (Tornstam, 1997, 2000, 2005). Other than spirituality, the review will cover theories and frameworks of aging, health-based conceptualizations of aging, development-based perspectives of aging, and components of successful aging, followed

by a literature review related to The Christian community. The chapter ends with a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature was obtained through a systematic search of keywords such as *gerotranscendence, meaning of life, aging, spiritual well-being, holistic nursing practice, meditation, religious practice, spirituality, successful aging, nontheistic, religiosity, conceptualization, spiritual well-being, and aging*. Databases included PubMed, EMBASE, PsycINFO, and Theroux Databases. The key terms used to access the literature also included *ageism, gerotranscendence, health and aging, life satisfaction and aging, quality of life and aging, learning and older adults, older adults, spirituality and aging, self-image and older adults, stereotypes, and aging, successful aging, and well-being and aging*. Most of the literature included in this review is 5 years old or less. The literature that went into shaping the conceptual framework of this study will be examined, followed by a discussion of studies related to aging. Before discussing studies on spirituality and aging, the literature that helped shape the theoretical foundation of this study will be examined.

Theoretical Foundation

Transformational Learning Theory

The transformational learning theory (Mezirow 1991, 2000, 2003) describes a process of “perspective transformation” experienced by adults as they identify, examine, and adapt their formerly held perspectives to cope with new experiences. Perspective

transformation involves three dimensions: psychological (changes in the understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (lifestyle changes).

People absorb beliefs and knowledge at a young age, the bulk of which is unconsciously taken in and accepted. However, later in adulthood, as life presents challenges and change triggered by a life crisis or a significant life transition, applying some of that formative learning turns ineffective. Newer perspectives become necessary to adapt to the recent turn of events and navigate adult life.

Mezirow termed the catalyst for this unique type of transformation a “disorienting dilemma,” which occurs when something a person holds as unquestionable becomes uncertain, such as retirement, loss of a spouse, or loss of a job (Mezirow, 1978a, 1991). Among disorienting dilemmas for the older adults in this study may be the awareness of becoming and looking old, retirement from a long-held career, changes in physical appearance, deterioration of health, or fear of death. The disorienting events or experiences that occur during adulthood can disconnect a person from long-established habits and practices of living and bring into sharp focus questions of identity, meaning, and direction of life. Such turning points can trigger reflection on how the aging individual thinks of themselves or actions, applying a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of their experience as a guide to future action (Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow suggested that the disorienting dilemma is the first of 10 phases of transformative learning. As older adults experience the changes and challenges of aging (Phase 1), they would critically examine the assumptions and beliefs they absorbed from

society (Phase 2) and discuss the issue with other aging adults within their social circle (Phase 3). Then together, they explore alternative options for perspectives (Phase 4), leading them to try out new self-identities, judgments, and beliefs (Phase 5). The focus is on how individuals learn to act on their own definitions, values, feelings, and meanings. The resulting structural evolution of how they see themselves and their relationships constitutes a perspective transformation (Cranton, 2006).

Mezirow's theory has gone through a process of expansion and development. In his dialogue with Mezirow, Dirkx has expanded Mezirow's original ideas and turned attention away from the cognitive processes of transformative learning to what he termed an "inner world" from which "spring questions and wonder about the meaning of life, about what we are here for and where we go after our time here is done - questions and wonder about God" (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 127). Dirkx's position on transformative learning integrates *outer and inner* lives to engage a more profound learning process as individuals challenge the assumptions they have long held. In summing up the dialogue, he declared, "I consider the act of learning to be an inherently spiritual act, at least in potential. It borders on the sacred, flirts with it, invites in the sacred, if we allow it" (p. 130). This expansion allows for transformative learning to be directly tied to the topic of this study—the lived spiritual experience of aging adults.

Gerotranscendence Theory

Unlike transformative learning, which may happen at any moment throughout life, gerotranscendence starts in midlife. The theory of gerotranscendence rejects the stance that aging is a continuation of midlife and indicates that in midlife, not only the

outer physical appearance of the body changes but also thoughts and ideas undergo metamorphosis. Accordingly, aging is a process where a person gradually changes from midlife's perceptions, values, and activity patterns into a life viewed more spiritually or cosmically with three distinct groupings of priorities that seem to accompany the gerotranscendence process consistently: the Self or Coherence Dimension, the Solitude or Relationship Dimension, and the Cosmic Dimension. People may assume a more reflective approach toward their past and childhood, experience a sense of oneness with the universe and nature, and project a new perception of time, space, and objects. Though the frequency of thoughts and feelings about death may increase, fear of death diminishes (Buchanan et al. 2016; George & Dixon, 2017; Tornstam, 1994, 1997a; 1997b, 2005, 2006).

Perhaps most important, the reason that reminiscence and some alone time for reflection are so essential is that those elders who experience a shift in the Self Dimension go through the inventory process of their life and begin to confront their biographies and choices. In this regard, Tornstam sees the gerotranscending individual as working to overcome the ego integrity versus despair dyad (the eighth and final stage of Erik Erikson's stage theory of psychosocial development) in a positive way that leads to an integration of the life course and a complete sense of meaning to not just their own life, but those of the people around them. This understanding, thanks to the shifting perception of the finality of life and death, includes a sense of meaning that also incorporates previous generations. One of the areas in which guided reminiscence and viewing an elder's need for solitude as natural (as opposed to a pathological part of the

aging process) is the powerful impact of changes to the Self Dimension, which can have a profound and positive influence on the lives of elders. Gerotranscendence may be defined as a meta-theoretical shift, where a more cosmic and transcendent one replaces the materialistic and rational vision, usually followed by increased life satisfaction (Erikson, 1950, 1982; George & Dixon, 2017).

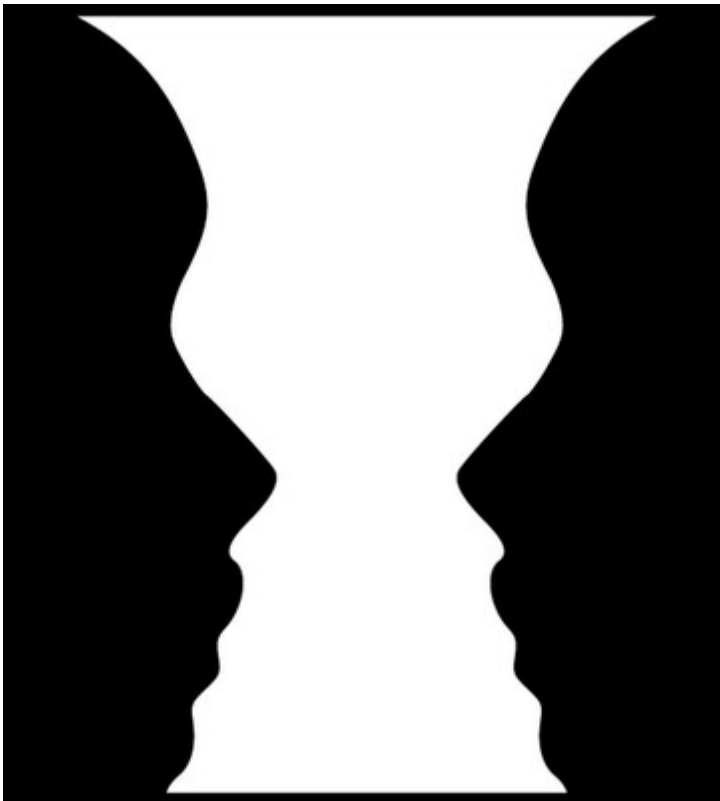
Before the theory of gerotranscendence became an influential paradigm, disengagement and activity theory both were the dominant models (Girard, 2014; Bruyneel, Marcoen, & Soenens, 2005; Schroots, 1996). Disengagement theory, developed by Cumming and Henry (1961), assumed that as people age, they withdraw from previous roles or activities, both psychological and social. Tornstam's (1997a) theory of gerotranscendence built on the disengagement theory, arguing that maturation and wisdom lead to increased contemplation and solitude, both of which are integral to transcendence (McCarthy & Bockweg, 2013).

Tornstam explained the meta-theoretical shift underlying his gerotranscendence theory by arguing regarding the individual, not as an object, but rather as a subject, a person. Thus, what is important to understand is the meaning the *individual* conveys to engagement or disengagement instead of the meaning the gerontologist imparts to the engagement or disengagement (Tornstam 1994). The classic Rubin Vase may provide a visual illustration of the meta-theoretical shift discussed. The beholder sees either two faces facing each other or, instead, a vase (Massmann, 2012, see Figure 1). The image in the picture seems to change as one's perspective changes. What was once the background is now the foreground and vice versa. Tornstam described gerotranscendence as a sudden,

late-life shift in meta-perspective from a materialistic and rational view of the world to a more mystical or cosmic perspective leading to a redefinition of time, space, life, death, and the self. The three dimensions—*cosmic*, *self*, and *other*—were marked by: (a) greater acceptance of self and others; (b) selectivity in relationships and activities; (c) decreased concern for social roles and expectations; (d) greater need for positive solitude and contemplation; (e) and decreased fear of death. Life satisfaction is the outcome of gerotranscendence (McCarthy & Bockweg, 2013).

Figure 1

Rubin Vase



Note. Source: (Massmann, 2012)

The gerotranscendence aspect that is most specifically related to the aging journey is that it strongly promotes the importance of spiritual development in later life as a shift in perspective from a materialistic and rational view of life to a more cosmic transcendent one. Even though it may be argued that gerotranscendence does not explicitly or directly address spirituality, Tornstam's theory suggests that gerotranscendence is a reorientation toward a new perspective and life experience understood as a spiritual transition (Dalby, 2006; Settersen & Godlewski, 2016). It will be beneficial to search for evidence of such a perspective shift in the current study participants.

This reorientation toward a new perspective is an experience of life characterized as spiritual. Tornstam's theory posits that successful aging is not defined by the ability to continue midlife patterns throughout old age but is shaped by the realization that old age has its particular meaning and character. Tornstam's theory, thus, stands in sharp contrast to some popular conceptualizations of successful aging. Tornstam treated gerotranscendence as being comparable to Zen Buddhism and suggested that when the paradigm shift occurs, the usual positivist way of thinking no more applies, and, thus, one must examine the world in a manner similar to how the Zen Buddhist looks at the world (Tornstam, 1989, 1994, 2005).

Dissimilar from the Westerner's positivist meta-theoretical paradigm, the Zen Buddhist lives in a cosmic world paradigm. A Zen Buddhist might look to a Westerner unfamiliar with Buddhism as disengaged. However, to the Zen Buddhist, who lives in the cosmic world paradigm, meditation is not disengagement but transcendence (Tornstam 1989). Zen Buddhism views the borders in the cosmic paradigm not as rigid straight lines

but, instead, free-flowing simultaneously with the past, present, and future. Individual persons are not separate beings but rather a part of something bigger than themselves. This feeling of being a part of something bigger than oneself brings to mind the collective unconscious, as described by Carl Jung. It refers to the mental structures that humans have inherited from their ancestors. Tornstam described that collective unconscious as something beyond borders between individuals, generations, or places (Jung, 1959; Tornstam, 1994).

Tornstam (2003) proposed that the many signs of gerotranscendence occur on three levels. First, the *cosmic level* is where transcendence involves an increased feeling of connection with the spirit of the universe; a revised definition of the perception of time, space, and objects; a new interpretation of the perception of life and death; a reduction in fear of death; and a boosted feeling of affinity with past and coming generations. Second, the *self level* is where individuals encounter hidden aspects of the self (both good and bad), dismiss themselves as the center of their universe, abandon the obsession with the body, experience a return to childhood, and realize that the pieces of life's puzzle form a whole. Finally, the *social (individual relations) level* involves solitude in the form of diminished interest in superficial relationships and materialistic possessions, a deepened need for meditation, and a tendency to suspend judgments and refrain from giving advice (Cozort, 2008).

Researchers have viewed gerotranscendence as a spontaneous process of self-transcendence, a growing spirituality, expanding boundaries, and increasing appreciation of the present (George & Dixon, 2017). Therefore, transcendence does not necessarily

have to wait for old age. Individuals can realize it at any age through spiritual practices or coping with trauma (Dalby, 2006; Levenson et al., 2005; Tornstam, 2005). Tornstam believed that the process of gerotranscendence is “intrinsic and culture free” (Tornstam, 1989, p. 59), though specific cultural patterns may modify it. Additionally, Tornstam suggested that gerotranscendence may be sped up when a terminal illness occurs in a younger person or inhibited when dominant societal views are contrary to the transcendent trend (Tornstam, 1989).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Spirituality

Spirituality, religiosity, and religion cover a broad spectrum of operational definitions employed in research. A crucial point for social scientists is the distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion has gravitated to religious life’s external, institutionalized, formal, and doctrinal aspects (Hill & Pargament, 2003). At the same time, “spirituality” has been used to refer to the personal, subjective experience. But a split between the institutional and the individual ignores that much spiritual expression occurs in a social context, often within an organized religion.

The term “religiosity” is another term in the literature that requires clarification. Research has defined it as someone’s faith and relationship with God (Koenig, 1994, p. xxiv). In practice, this term tends to be used concerning religious behaviors such as church attendance or prayer and religious coping behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes given to measurement. The term “spirituality” is broader than “religiosity” and may or may not include a relationship with God or a higher power (Koenig, 1994).

This study emphasizes the personal and subjective side of spiritual experience rather than behavioral elements such as church attendance. Though behavior may have many motivations, understanding people's lived experiences more directly could better assist in understanding developmental processes. Spirituality is a way people seek to discover, hold on to, and, as need be, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives which aspect distinguishes religion and spirituality from other facets of life and may include concepts of God, the divine, ultimate reality, and the transcendent (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Reference to the transcendent is to be understood to lie beyond or outside the individual human life or material realm. Further, spirituality can be seen as "the motivational and emotional foundation of the lifelong quest for meaning" (McFadden, 1996, p. 164). Many writers also underscore meaning-making or a search for meaning as a central aspect of spirituality (e.g., Aponte, 2002; MacKinlay, 2001b; McFadden, 1996; Ortiz & Langer, 2002). Spirituality is understood here as concerned with a search for meaning concerning the sacred.

In sum, as consistently defined in research, spirituality is a search, or communion with, the sacred to derive meaning and purpose (Pargament et al., 2013b). This definition has become nearly consensual among scientists in the study of spirituality and is reflected in approximately two-thirds of studies on the topic (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010). Embedded in this definition are three core concepts – the sacred or the transcendent (beyond the ordinary), a connection or relationship with the sacred, and the search for ultimate meaning or purpose (Maysseless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

Spirituality and Religiousness

Religiousness and spirituality are two concepts that have intrigued many theorists and researchers for the past few decades. The aspiration of developing satisfactory definitions of these two concepts continues to be the goal of the scientific community (Oman, 2013). Though there is no consensus in the literature on defining religiousness and spirituality, a literature review will provide a foundational understanding of these complex concepts and clarify the terms.

The current research adopts the definition of spirituality as a person's relationship with the sacred (Hill et al., 2000; Oman, 2013; Pargament et al., 2013; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Spirituality refers to the search for the sacred (Pargament et al., 2013), where "search" refers to an ongoing discovery, conservation, and transformation journey. And "sacred" denotes, besides the concepts of God and higher powers, other aspects of life that are perceived as manifestations of the divine or imbued with divinelike qualities, such as transcendence, immanence, and boundlessness ultimacy (Pargament et al., 2013). However, these definitions cannot be acceptable in their entirety since they lack an integrative approach to the field of psychology (Brandt, 2019).

Religion refers to a similar search facilitated by institutions, which may help with belonging, reduce anxiety, or give meaning (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15; Schlehofer et al., 2008). Religion is directed toward pursuing a broader array of destinations or significant goals than spirituality. Although religion facilitates spirituality, it also serves other functions. In contrast, spirituality focuses on searching for one particular compelling destination, the sacred. Spirituality is not restricted to an individual's

relationship with the sacred, understood traditionally as God or a higher power. Whether psychological, social, or physical, secular functions can also be imbued with sacred status. In contrast, although spirituality can be a vital part of traditional religious life, it may similarly be embedded in nontraditional contexts (Litonjua, 2016; Pargament et al., 2013; Zinnbauer et al., 1999).

There are both complementary and polarizing distinctions between religion and spirituality (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). The current research takes the more complementary perspective, assuming that religion and spirituality are overlapping (but not identical) constructs. Heuristically speaking, the reference here is on religion as “the organized and institutional components of faith traditions.” At the same time, spirituality addresses the individual’s relationship with and search for the sacred involving self-transcendence. Spirituality often occurs in the context of religion, but it also can happen outside of traditional religious boundaries (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005).

Religiosity is often understood as a formal, institutional, and exterior expression (Cotton et al., 2006) of the relationship with the sacred, typically operationalized as beliefs and practices attributed to a particular religious worldview and community (Iannello et al., 2019). On the other hand, spirituality is conceptualized as a search for meaning in life, a personal connection with transcendent realities, and interconnectedness with humanity (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 2008; Worthington et al., 2011; Zinnbauer et al., 1999). And it is consequently operationalized as the human yearning for transcendence (King & Boyatzis, 2015), experienced in or outside a specific religious context (Benson et al., 2003; Villani et al., 2019).

Spirituality indicators may include self-transcendence, belief in God or the sacred, meaning in life, and personal spiritual practices, such as meditation and contemplative prayer (Cloninger et al., 1993; Levenson et al., 2005; Piedmont, 1999; Reed, 1991). According to Reed, self-transcendence is: “the capacity to expand self-boundaries *intrapersonally* (toward greater awareness of one’s philosophy, values, and dreams), *interpersonally* (to relate to others and one’s environment), *temporally* (to integrate one’s past and future in a way that has meaning for the present), and *transpersonally* (to connect with dimensions beyond the typically discernible world)” (Reed, 2003, pp. 145–165).

Spirituality and Aging

Interest in spirituality and aging has increased recently, primarily due to empirical research demonstrating the various health benefits of spirituality (Dalby, 2006; Koenig et al., 2001). With the loss, change, physical illness, and mortality encountered in old age, the idea of a spiritual perspective seems credible (Dalby, 2006). Spirituality has a moderating effect on the positive relationships with various measures of life satisfaction, psychosocial well-being, both physical and mental health and is helpful in the quest for meaning and purpose in life (Moberg 2001). Spirituality is a significant resource for most people in coping with changes that occur as a result of aging, including widowhood and disability as well as retirement and grandparenthood (Atchley, 2006). As found in several longitudinal panel studies that followed the same individuals over time, spirituality intersects with aging due to its increased importance as people age (Atchley 1999; Clark & Anderson 1967; Fiske & Chiriboga 1990; Koenig 1995; Moberg 1997, 2005; Roof

1999). Mounting spiritual goals and pursuits accompanied by increased introspection are a natural part of the maturational process from mid to later life (Jung, 1959). Thus, spirituality “is a vital context for understanding aging” (Atchley, 2009, p. 149).

The challenges confronting research on spirituality include, but are not limited to, logistical and funding limitations and the ambiguity of defining and measuring spirituality (Yaden & Newberg 2018). Well-designed large-scale studies are also lacking, and many publications are basically anecdotal and cannot establish causality or scientifically justify the use of specific interventions (Seifert, 2002). Further, existing studies are mainly correlational. For example, Townsend et al. (2002) conducted a systematic review of studies from 1996 to 1999, reporting nine randomized controlled trials that may not be devoid of spurious findings. But the number and sophistication of scientific studies should continue to improve due to the rising interest in spirituality and the mind (Townsend et al., 2002).

Some writers have also called for a greater understanding of spirituality and its meaning per se in old age (e.g., Kimble, 2001; Thompson, 1993). When working with their clients, providers of clinical services have a responsibility to take the whole person (Langer, 2000). The importance of integrating spiritual issues into the psychological care of older people has been noted (e.g., Ortiz & Langer, 2002; Koenig et al., 1996).

Spiritual Life Review

The concept of a *spiritual life review* was introduced by Lewis (2001), who suggested that late-life development counseling should integrate spirituality with Butler’s (1963) life review process framed in Erikson’s epigenetic stages of life development, thus

transforming the spiritual life review into a modified version of the commonly used life review, a productive counseling technique for older adults. A literature review found only one example of a spiritual life review, authored by Hateley (1985). Hateley described an adult education course in which a structured spiritual life review was conducted that showed encouraging findings of participants' increased personal insight and enhanced spiritual well-being.

The discovery that the spiritual life review can benefit older adults by explicitly focusing on spirituality is promising for gerontological social workers to help facilitate positive emotional and mental outcomes with older adults facing issues of late-life development (Lewis, 2001). Furthermore, researchers hypothesize that spiritual life reviews with older adults in nursing homes can benefit. These individuals are often challenged with identity issues and the meaning of life (Lewis, 2001). Despite the lack of empirical evidence on spiritual life reviews per se with older adults, much literature supports using spiritual assessments and interventions to promote spiritual well-being (Feldman & Howie, 2009; Hodge, 2000; Peck, 2001; Staude, 2005).

Despite the lack of empirical evidence on spiritual life reviews per se with older adults, using spiritual life review questions in interviewing participants seems pertinent to this study's research question of how older people describe their lived experience of spirituality and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey.

The Christian Community

The Christian Community (i.e., used as a proper noun referring to a specific denomination and not as a common noun that would include all of Christianity) is an

esoteric Christian denomination. Esoteric Christianity is an approach to Christianity that features secret traditions and requires an initiation to learn or understand (Stroumsa, 2005). Encompassing approximately 200 independent congregations worldwide and 14 congregations in North America, The Christian Community was founded in 1922 in Switzerland by Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner, an Austrian philosopher, social reformer, architect, esotericist, and claimed clairvoyant (Phelan, 2021). His first followers were a group of mainly Lutheran theologians and ministers led by liberal theologian Friedrich Rittelmeyer. The latter had been the most prominent representative of liberal Lutheranism in Germany during the First World War.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Steiner gained initial recognition as a literary critic and published philosophical works, including *The Philosophy of Freedom* (Thoresen, 2018). Also, he founded the esoteric spiritual movement called “The Christian Community” at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as anthroposophy. This movement postulates the existence of an objective, intellectually comprehensible spiritual world accessible to human experience (Paull, 2018). Followers of anthroposophy aim to engage in spiritual discovery through a mode of thought independent of sensory experience (McDermott, 1984). Anthroposophers also aim to present their ideas in a manner verifiable by rational discourse (Sparby, 2020). In studying the spiritual world, they seek precision and clarity comparable to scientists investigating the physical world (Sparby, 2020).

Theories and Frameworks of Aging

Two major sociological perspectives inform the theories of aging: (a) health-based perspective theories focus on disease and disability as well as withdrawal or disengagement from social interactions and activities, and (b) developmental-based perspective theories that concentrate on spirituality as developmental changes in later life.

Health-Based Conceptualizations of Aging

The history of theories on aging dates back to ancient times, spanning many alternative perspectives on successful and unsuccessful aging. Historically, aging was presumed as a time associated with disease and disability as well as withdrawal or disengagement from social interactions and activities as purported by the disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961). On the other hand, activity theory proposes that old age is when older adults adjust, redefine, and substitute their roles and activities to maintain their sense of self (Havighurst, 1961).

As theorists began rejecting these premises, positive theories of aging focusing on health and activity emerged. Thus, successful aging is attained when individuals exhibit three qualities: (a) disease and disability as low probability, (b) cognitively and physically at high functional capacity, and (c) social activity and engagement in social relationships at a high level (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Successful aging assumes that “through individual choice and effort,” one can age successfully and remain physically and socially active (Rowe & Kahn, 1997, p. 37).

Another theory is productive aging, which argues that older adults must engage in social activities and produce goods and services via paid or volunteer employment, thus

remaining active and productive (Bass et al., 1993). This last conceptualizing resonated with the more recent concept of healthy aging, defined as “living a long, productive, meaningful life and enjoying a high quality of life” (White House Conference on Ageing, 2015).

Current aging theories, such as active and successful aging, were developed as a counter-response to approaches focusing on decline, loss, and disengagement. As a favorable policy, this framework was created by the World Health Organization to assist governments in promoting and supporting active aging. Active aging focuses on connecting health and activity through six determinants: health and social services, behavioral, personal, physical, social, and economic (World Health Organization, 2002).

Development-Based Perspectives on Aging

Many early gerontological and psychological formulations of successful aging foreshadow Tornstam’s (2005) developmental theory of positive aging, which he termed “gerotranscendence.” Successful aging counteracts erroneous projections of midlife values, activity patterns, and expectations of old age (Tornstam, 2005). To shed light on the shared foundations and interconnectedness of some leading conceptualizations of psychological theories that view spirituality as developmental changes in later life, one may consider the overlap between formulations of Erikson’s (1982) model of psychosocial development, Peck’s (1968) ego transcendence, the four-stage Hindu model of the life span (Ramamurti & Jamuna, 2010), and Tornstam’s (1989, 1996) theory of gerotranscendence.

Erik Erikson's life cycle eight stages of human development are (1) Trust vs. Mistrust, (2) Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt, (3) Initiative vs. Guilt, (4) Industry vs. Inferiority; (5) Identity vs. Confusion; (6) Intimacy vs. Isolation; (7) Generativity vs. Stagnation; (8) Integrity vs. Despair. The eighth and final stage of psychosocial development, ego integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1950), can be seen as an earlier version of the successful aging concept (Martin et al., 2014). This final stage extends from age 65 up to the end of life. Upon reflecting on their lives and anguish over not achieving their goals, those individuals will experience bitterness and despair. Thus, ego integrity is accepting one's life cycle as something that must be (Martin et al., 2014).

Robert Peck (1968) expanded Erikson's 8th stage (1950) by including other aspects of the aging adult's life than ego integrity versus despair. Thus, the conflict in the mid-age of valuing wisdom over one's physical powers and socializing over sexualizing. (Peck 1968). When aging adult resolves these two conflicts, they can accept the dwindling of their physical body while creatively using the mind to negate these losses (Peck, 1968).

Among Peck's tasks of ego integrity are ego differentiation, body transcendence, and ego transcendence. Ego differentiation is differentiation among varied role activities as well as among different attributes of personality. Thus, if a person's self-respect is built primarily on the value of rugged independence, he may feel that nothing is left to live if he can no longer fulfill this part of his makeup. Antithetically, a man or woman who derives satisfaction in being a "good friend" or in the sensual pleasures of sunning, swimming, or some other side of his nature may welcome retirement as an opportunity to

engage in these different aspects of life more fully. Similarly, body transcendence involves willingly accepting physical limitations by compensating with rewards of one's cognitive, social, and emotional energy. In contrast, ego transcendence is achieved when the aging adult transcends self-concerns and ego preoccupation with death (Peck, 1968).

Tornstam's (2005) concept of gerotranscendence shares core components with the last two stages of the four-stage Hindu life span model. Indian texts of the ancient and medieval eras cite four age-based stages within the life span: Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (retired), and Sannyasa (renunciate) (Olivelle, 2004). Thus, youth is a stage of preparation through Brahmacharya (study) for later life, especially for the second Grihastha (productive life stage), focusing on roles contributing to the family, work, and society. In the third stage of life, Vanaprastha (retiree), a transition to a more self-oriented and contemplative life happens. The Vanaprastha (retiree) discards pleasures, physical, material, and sexual, and hands over household responsibilities to the next generation while taking an advisory role and gradually retreats from social and professional life to spend time in meditation and prayer. Further, the retired person at this stage emanates a general sense of happiness throughout life with family and friends and becomes free to contemplate the meaning of the upcoming death and rebirth (Ramamurti & Jamuna, 2010).

Components of Successful Aging

The evolving concept of successful aging, while defying consensus, has emerged from early theories of activity and disengagement to theoretical approaches with the focus revolving around "how long," "how well," or "how healthy." Successful aging has

been used synonymously with diverse terms like healthy aging, productive aging, and aging well (Butler, 1988; Depp & Jeste, 2006; Peel, McClure, & Bartlett, 2005; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001). In addition, the term successful aging shifted the focus to longevity research with an emphasis on “healthy longevity” (Christensen et al., 2008; Gondo, 2006; Willcox et al., 2006; Yi et al., 2009). Finally, quality of life has come to be promoted as an essential component of successful aging (Kim & Park, 2017). This terminology implies that later life should be a time of maintaining health and vitality rather than succumbing to illness and dependence (Martin et al., 2015).

Over the last 50 years, the concept of successful aging and its definition have been examined by numerous researchers from diverse angles, producing various models and theories (Martin et al., 2015). In one such model, Selective Optimization With Compensation, it is recommended that elders select and optimize their best abilities and most intact functions while compensating for declines and losses throughout life (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Freund et al., 2017; Wahl, 2020). In another lifespan development psychology theory, the socioemotional selectivity theory, Carstensen posits that older people, as they age, hold on to smaller social circles to achieve maximum closeness (Lang & Carstensen, 2002).

In the earlier version of their successful aging and Positive Spirituality model, Rowe and Kahn (1987) defined successful aging as avoiding disease and disability by differentiating it from “Usual Aging.” Later, they expanded the model to include maintaining physical and cognitive function and engaging in social and productive activities (Rowe & Kahn, 1997, 1998). Thus, the model became applicable for future

intervention studies (Riley, 1998). Accordingly, Rowe and Kahn's model (1987, 1998) comprises three components: (1) Avoid disease or disability. (2) Maintain high cognitive and physical function. (3) Prolong active engagement in life.

Other studies on successful aging include studies on the perception of successful aging among diverse populations (Cheung & Lau, 2015; Javadi Pashaki et al., 2015; Kelly & Lazarus, 2015; Reichstadt et al., 2010; Romo et al., 2013), exploration of successful aging strategies (Harmell et al., 2014; Woo, 2011), as well as developing and testing instruments promoting successful aging (Troutman et al., 2011). The conceptual framework of this study was grounded in the ideas of the construction of reality and the shifting of perspectives.

Summary and Conclusions

The theories of transformative learning and gerotranscendence intersect in midlife. The lynchpin latching the two theories together is the "perspective shift" concept. Both Mezirow (1991, 2000, 2003) and Tornstam (1997, 2000, 2005) described critical events that catalyze fundamental shifts in perspective. Mezirow named them disorienting dilemmas, and Tornstam called them life crises. The likely result described by each theory is a change in how the individual constructs reality relating to the constructivist philosophy that grounds the theoretical framework of this study. While Mezirow (1991, 2000, 2003) focused on the learning process irrespective of when it occurs within the life span, Tornstam (1997, 2000, 2005) specified mid-life adulthood and beyond. Tornstam's theory of gerotranscendence has introduced a new understanding of aging, viewing human development as a life-long process (Wadensten, 2007).

Gerotranscendence, when reached, deals not only with human development but also with maturity, wisdom, identity, and coping patterns. The proportion of older adults who reach gerotranscendence is relatively not significant. Many people display different degrees of its three dimensions: the cosmic dimension, the self-dimension, and the social and personal relationship dimensions. Life's disorienting dilemmas or critical events can accelerate the process of cosmic transcendence, frequently described as the catalyst to transformative learning (Erickson, 2007), such as the death of a close person (Tornstam, 2005; Wadensten & Carlsson, 2003). However, although not all adults will experience gerotranscendence as they age, those who experience it undergo a shift in perspective (Wadensten & Carlsson, 2003).

Tornstam characterized gerotranscendence as the eventual phase of moving toward maturation and wisdom. Before one can enter a new life, one must die to the current one. The new person, the "gerotranscendental individual," experiences a fresh feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe. This feeling involves a redefinition of time, space, life, and death. It is a redefinition of the self (Tornstam, 2000). In sum, gerotranscendence is a reorientation toward a new perspective wherein life experienced as a spiritual reality. This study will help search for evidence of such a perspective shift among the participants in the current study. In Chapter 3, the research methodology and procedures to be followed in investigating the lived spirituality phenomenon of aging adults in The Christian Community will be detailed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative study aimed to gain insights into the lived experience of the spirituality of a sample of the members of The Christian Community, aged 65 and above, and its relevance to assisting them over their life course. The progressive aging of society, caused by profound demographic changes, necessitates confronting “ageism” biases against older people. Robert Neil Butler coined the term to describe the bigotry that aging is dreaded, resisted, and feared (Butler, 2008). Despite this hostile environment, the literature has linked several factors with successful aging, including spirituality (Dalby, 2006; Moberg, 2008; Thomas & Cohen, 2006). This chapter introduces the rationale for the research method used, the procedures followed, and a description of the potential strengths and weaknesses of the study. The research question guiding this study is: How do older people describe their lived experience of spirituality and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey?

The topic and research question were chosen, among other reasons, to help fill a gap in the literature. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 showed that aging and spirituality had been the topic of many studies. These studies indicated that spirituality and faith become more critical as people age. There is also evidence that spiritual (and religious) practices are associated with successful aging (Dalby, 2006; Moberg, 2008; Thomas & Cohen, 2006). Additionally, according to Lepherd et al. (2020), there is currently a gap in the literature relating to qualitative studies of the spirituality of older people in various circumstances. This study sought to understand how aging individuals in The Christian Community perceive their lived experience of spirituality while aging.

For a holistic understanding, qualitative research was needed (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2015). The constructivist perspective assumes that individuals construct different realities to be studied rather than a single reality presumed to exist in nature (Hatch, 2002). Holistic inquiry captures complex interdependencies and system dynamics that cannot be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear cause-effect relationships. The whole phenomenon is a complex system greater than the sum of its parts (Patton, 2015).

A qualitative approach is used to gain insights into aging from a person's inner perspective rather than the researcher observing, defining, and understanding it from their point of view (Tornstam, 2005). Such an understanding comes through careful attention to detail and context in greater depth than is possible through quantitative measures (Patton, 2015). This chapter lays out my rationale for choosing phenomenology as the qualitative research method for this study and then discusses the procedures, sampling, and participants. The remaining sections detail the data collection methods, describe the data analysis procedures, outline the key issues related to scientific rigor, define the researcher's role, and discuss the study's potential limitations.

Research Design and Rationale

The overriding goal of this research was to explore the lived spirituality experience of older adults. The research question is: How do older people describe their lived experience of spirituality and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey? As a universal human phenomenon, spirituality is a significant and universal aspect of the human experience. The specific content of spiritual belief, practice, and experience

varies, but all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred, or divine force (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Three qualitative research methods other than phenomenology considered for this study seemed less appropriate: ethnography, case study, and phenomenology.

Ethnography may be defined as a qualitative research process as well as a method and product whose aim is cultural interpretation. The ethnographer goes beyond reporting events and details of experience (Hoey, 2016). While the topic of this study is the spirituality of aging individuals who subscribe to and live by the principles of The Christian Community, the research question of this study directs the inquiry toward individual experience rather than that of a social group. Data collection in ethnographic research includes prolonged field observations (Hatch, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Such fieldwork involves gathering data on the communication and interactions within a social group. Also, the possibility of observing church services and classes in one Christian Community church would entail considerable investment in time. Still, it would yield little insight into the experience of spirituality and aging for individual participants. An ethnographic study would not have addressed the issue of this study's research question effectively.

Case study, the second possible design considered, seemed, at first sight, to be appropriate. The procedures appeared to be more closely aligned with the research question than those of ethnography. Case study research consists of a detailed investigation, often with empirical material collected over a period of time from a well-defined case to provide an analysis of the context and processes involved in the

phenomenon (Yin, 2017). The case study method is appropriate when (a) the research question form is explanatory, (b) there is a lack of control over relevant behaviors, and (c) the subject of research is contemporary (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2003). Case studies endeavor to describe a unit of analysis “in depth and detail, holistically, and in context” (Patton, 2015, p. 121).

Moreover, the use of the case study approach initially seemed to be appropriate for this study because the lived spiritual experience of the aging participants cannot be fully comprehended without situating that experience within the context of the principles and practices of The Christian Community. The way members in The Christian Community perceive their aging experience and the influence of their spiritual principles and practices on those perceptions represent a concrete, real-life issue. “Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41).

However, specifying a valid unit of analysis to conduct a case study becomes problematic. Choosing a church site as the unit of analysis would not have directly addressed the study research question, which seeks to understand individual members’ perceptions, not to mention the risk of not finding enough information-rich cases from a single church. The case study approach did not fit this study’s purpose and research question.

Phenomenological design “describes one or more individuals’ experiences of a phenomenon” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 363). The phenomenon in this study is the lived experience of the spirituality of older adults and the relevance thereof to

adapting to their aging journey within the context of The Christian Community. The objective of a phenomenological study was to extract from study participants a description of their experiences and understand what those experiences mean to them. That fit most closely with the research question of this study.

This study focused on individuals' lived spirituality experiences, for which a psychological phenomenological approach seems appropriate. Of the two major phenomenological approaches, the empirical (Giorgi, 1985) and the transcendental (Moustakas, 1994), the latter was more appropriate for the current paper. According to Moustakas (1994), "The aim [of the transcendental phenomenological approach] was to determine what an experience means for the persons who have the experience and can provide a comprehensive description. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words, the essences or structures of the experience" (p. 13). Whether occurring within one's mind or between one and others or processes in the external world, phenomena or experiences constitute the source of all knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

Role of the Researcher

Moustakas described the nonjudgmental empathic stance as "'being in' another's world, immersing oneself in another's world by listening deeply and attentively so as to enter into the other person's experience and perception" (Patton, 2015, p. 114). However, the researcher is only an observer, irrespective of how closely the researcher will be involved with the participants while conducting in-depth interviews and taking an empathic stance while exploring the phenomenon.

As the researcher, the author will not have had any personal or professional relationship whatsoever with the participants. Given the nature of qualitative research, the role of the researcher is central to the study design. The researcher is the primary data collection instrument, which means that previously held values, beliefs, and biases of the researcher play a critical part and, therefore, need to be explicitly delineated (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The subject of this study is spirituality and aging, and as a researcher, my perspective is influenced by my spiritual background and experience with aging.

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insights into the lived experience of spirituality of a sample of the American population aged 65 and above and its relevance to assisting them over their life course. The specific research design included the transcendental phenomenological method as the procedures (Moustakas, 1994) outlined. Eight members of The Christian Community, a metaphysical branch of Christianity, were interviewed to investigate their lived spirituality experience as they advanced. In this chapter, the rationale for the research method used is introduced, the procedures followed are described, and the potential strengths and weaknesses of the study are pointed out. The research question guiding the study is: How do older people of The Christian Community describe their lived experience of spirituality and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey?

When deciding on a study design, the student should aim for one that is explicit regarding how data saturation is reached. Data saturation is reached when there is enough

information to replicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012), when the ability to obtain additional new information has been exhausted (Guest et al., 2006), and when further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006). The first criterion for participation in this study, having experience with the phenomenon, is divided into two parts. The phenomenon is (a) the lived experience of spirituality with aging and (b) living by the principles and practices of The Christian Community. In terms of experience with aging, participants of age 65 and up will be selected. There are no rules for sample size in qualitative studies (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, a phenomenological investigation's extensive and rigorous interviewing procedures dictate the required participant count. These participants contribute a diverse range of experiences, facilitating the synthesis of a comprehensive understanding. This approach allows the researcher to address the research question with ample detail, aligning with the sample size considerations found in comparable phenomenological studies (Ann-Lorenz, 2009; Mackey, 2007; Resick, 2008).

Participant Selection Logic

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived spiritual experience of aging of people who follow the spiritual principles and practices of The Christian Community. Prior researchers have investigated the intersection of spirituality and aging, but "insufficient attention has been given to denominational variations among Christians" (Blieszner & Ramsey, 2002, p. 34). The same goes for the attention given to the metaphysical branch of Christianity (Albanese, 2007). To create a pool of information-rich participants, participants in this study had to meet the following criteria: (a) having had experience with the phenomenon, (b) being highly interested in

understanding its nature and meanings, (c) being willing and able to share their experience in an in-depth interview, and (d) have no objection to the interview being recorded, transcribed, and made part of a published dissertation (Moustakas, 1994).

The first criterion for participation in this study, having experience with the phenomenon, can be seen as comprising two subcategories: (a) experiencing aging and (b) living by the principles and practices of The Christian Community. Eight members aged (≥ 65) were selected. In qualitative studies, there are no rules for sample size (Patton, 2015). However, as mentioned, a phenomenological study's intense and lengthy interview process renders fewer participants necessary. Eight individuals supply a sufficient variety of experience to synthesize an overall meaning, enable the researcher to answer the research question with rich detail, and fit within the sample size decisions of similar phenomenological studies (Ann-Lorenz, 2009; Mackey, 2007; Resick, 2008).

Phenomenological research requires such detailed inquiry for understanding the experiences of others so that we can glean new insights about a particular phenomenon. Participants need to have enough span of time beyond the actual occurrence of the experience so they can reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and memories of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). People aged 65 and over encompass the period immediately before and after the traditional retirement age of 65, a major milestone in aging. Such people would have begun experiencing the physical, mental, emotional, and social effects of aging.

The second part of the criterion of having experience with the phenomenon is that participants need to have sufficient engagement with and commitment to the principles

and practices of The Christian Community. The study participants will be persons identified as demonstrating that they regularly live by The Christian Community tenets. The participants included in the study needed to be followers of the principles and practices of The Christian Community so that they would be the best possible sources of information.

Purposeful sampling was used in the study to locate information-rich participants (Patton, 2015). While it would be relatively straightforward to identify people aged 65 and over, finding people who live by the tenets of The Christian Community sufficiently to provide data to most fully address the research question was less straightforward. The particular purposeful sampling strategies selected to ensure my ability to compose a group of participants with the necessary immersion in The Christian Community required (a) intensity sampling and (b) snowball sampling. Intensity sampling is called for because of my interest in finding spiritually mature participants able to articulate their engagement with The Christian Community principles and practices. By seeking participants who manifested The Christian Community lifestyle intensely and searching for those who are deeply immersed in the principles and practices of The Christian Community, the author was able to answer the research question of this study fully. To facilitate obtaining the required sample, a referral process was designed to increase the chances of finding participants from whom the researcher could learn the most (Patton, 2015).

To obtain the sample, key informants and ministers from different Christian Community churches and centers were asked to identify three members meeting the

criteria. Each minister was emailed an invitation to participate/informed consent form and a screening questionnaire. The invitation to participate/informed consent form contained (a) a brief description of the study and its purpose, (b) the requirements of participants, (c) the participant criteria sought, and (d) the researcher's contact information. The screening questionnaire (see Appendix A) included dichotomous questions designed to ensure that the individual meets the sampling criteria and has no exclusions listed for the study. In addition to using key informants to obtain participants, the research design included snowball sampling. At the end of their interview, participants were asked if they knew another member who met the study criteria and might be interested in participating.

Instrumentation

Four data collection instruments were employed in this investigation: audiotapes, field notes, direct observations, and intensive interviews. Moustakas (1994) described the data collection procedure as part of "an organized, disciplined, and systematic study" (p. 103) that includes (a) "developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process" (p. 103) and (b) "conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question" (p. 104). Effective information gathering requires that the phenomenon under study be placed in brackets, thus setting aside other topics and issues.

The researcher employed in-depth interviewing, field notes, and direct observations of the phenomenon being studied to enable the data collection instruments to answer the study's research questions. When a researcher identifies the data collection method in qualitative studies, the researcher must be reflexive in their stance as a data

collector (Patton, 2015). The researcher must maintain awareness of one's own biases and role as an inquirer.

Since this study was a transcendental phenomenological investigation, the primary data collection method was in-depth personal interviews. In addition, a written protocol allowed the participants to reflect on spirituality and aging before their interview. Data collected from all three sources were transcribed verbatim and entered into NVivo software to compile a database. This activity was the final step in the essential data collection process. The data were then coded and analyzed. Deeper meanings and themes emerged. Throughout the data collection and analysis procedures, the researcher kept field notes tracing one's thinking and revelations at all times spent with participants. Recorded direct observations included the emotions and non-verbal behaviors of the participant. Patton (2015) emphasized that field notes should not be interpretative but descriptive. Therefore, taking field notes entailed writing down what was observed and not an analysis of the interview experience.

The intensive interviews that were conducted with participants included two parts. At first, the older adults were asked demographic questions, and then a series of interview questions about the phenomenon being studied would follow (see Appendices A and B, respectively). The interview questions would answer the research question: How do older people describe their lived experience of spirituality and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey?

Participants in this study had to meet the following criteria: (a) having had experience with the phenomenon as (a) the lived experience of spirituality with aging and

of living by the principles and practices of The Christian Community, (b) being highly interested in understanding its nature meaning. For this study, an effort was made to interview key informants from different positions (Majid et al., 2017). A key informant is a person with whom the researcher will likely spend considerable time (Patton, 2015). Upon initial telephone contact, the participants were screened and vetted for inclusion in the study and met all criteria for the study. The researcher would obtain their email address and forward a copy of the consent form to read and sign. The interview was conducted on the telephone, and the participants were asked all questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived spiritual experience of aging as perceived by people who follow the spiritual principles and practices of “The Christian Community.” Prior researchers have investigated the intersection of aging and spirituality, but denominational variations among Christians have received insufficient attention (Blieszner & Ramsey, 2002, p. 34). Scholars have directed even less attention to the metaphysical branch of Christianity (Albanese, 2007). To create a pool of information-rich participants, it seems essential that participants in this study meet the following criteria: (a) live the experience of the phenomenon, (b) are interested in understanding the phenomenon’s nature and meanings, (c) have the will and ability to share their experience in in-depth interviewing, and (d) do not object to the interview being recorded, transcribed, and made part of a published dissertation (Moustakas, 1994).

The first participation criterion of the current study, living the experience of the phenomenon, has two aspects: (a) living the spirituality of aging and (b) living by the principles and practices of The Christian Community. Eight individuals aged 65 and over were selected to form a purposeful sample. The researcher emailed several Christian Community ministers an invitation to participate/an informed consent form, and a screening questionnaire. The invitation to participate/informed consent form contained (a) a brief description of the study and its purpose, (b) the requirements of participants, (c) the participant criteria sought, and (d) the researcher's contact information. The screening questionnaire (see Appendix A) included dichotomous questions designed to ensure that the individual met the sampling criteria and had no exclusions listed for the study.

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative studies (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, the extensive and rigorous interviewing procedures inherent in a phenomenological investigation dictate the required participant count. The interview sample of eight participants contributed a diverse range of experiences, facilitating the synthesis of a comprehensive meaning. This approach empowers the researcher to address the research question with intricate detail, aligning with the sample size considerations found in comparable phenomenological studies (Ann-Lorenz, 2009; Mackey, 2007; Resick, 2008). This sample of eight recruits included participants (≥ 65) for a coherent cohort with sufficient time to experience aging without having the health challenges typical of later years. This practice is necessary to fulfill the tenet of phenomenological research, which requires sufficient time beyond an experience for

participants to reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and memories of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). People aged 65+ encapsulate the period immediately before and after the traditional retirement age milestone of 65, a major milestone in aging.

Part (2) of the criterion of having experience with the phenomenon involves participants having had sufficient engagement with and commitment to the principles and practices of The Christian Community. The eight study participants were identified as demonstrating that they lived by The Christian Community tenets regularly. This requirement does not necessarily imply that they attend church regularly or have committed to specific classes. Neither do they have to have read The Christian Community publications periodically. These measures are easily taken but do not necessarily yield participants who embrace and follow, rather than understand and agree with, the tenets of The Christian Community. Individuals included in the study had to be followers of the principles and practices of The Christian Community to be the best possible sources of information.

The researcher used purposeful sampling to locate 8 information-rich participants for this study (Patton, 2015). While it would be relatively uncomplicated and effortless to locate individuals aged (≥ 65), finding participants who live by the tenets of The Christian Community sufficiently to provide data that would most fully address the research question was less straightforward.

To ensure the ability to compose a group of participants with the necessary immersion in The Christian Community, the researcher selected two specific, purposeful sampling strategies in the current study - (a) intensity sampling and (b) snowball

sampling. Intensity sampling was called for because the researcher is interested in finding participants who are spiritually mature as well as able to articulate their engagement with The Christian Community principles and practices. By seeking out individuals manifesting The Christian Community lifestyle intensely and searching for members who are deeply immersed in the principles and practices of The Christian Community, the researcher was able to answer the research question of this study fully. The researcher asked key informants and ministers from different Christian Community churches and centers to identify three individuals meeting the criteria to obtain this sample. The researcher explained to the ministers the purpose of the study and asked that they forward introductory material on the study to members in the stated age range known to live by The Christian Community principles and practices. The ministers were asked questions such as, “Who of the church members you know aged 65 and older embraces “The Christian Community” principles and practices deeply and demonstrates a life that is built around the tenets of “The Christian Community?” This referral process was intended to increase the chances of finding people from whom the researcher could learn the most (Patton, 2015).

The researcher emailed each minister an invitation to participate/informed consent form and a screening questionnaire. The invitation to participate/informed consent form contained (a) a brief description of the study and its purpose, (b) the requirements of participants, (c) the participant criteria sought, and (d) the researcher’s contact information. The screening questionnaire (see Appendix A) included dichotomous

questions designed to ensure that the individual met the sampling criteria and had no exclusions listed for the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis aims to make sense of the information collected in a study and convert data into findings. This process involves sifting unimportant facts or details from significant ones, identifying worthy-of-attention patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals (Patton, 2015). While the collected numerical data are analyzed through formalized and detailed procedures in quantitative research, guidelines replace absolute rules in qualitative research. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research, in general, has been constantly critiqued for the lack of consensus in assessing its quality and robustness (Creswell (1998). Patton (2015) explains why applying guidelines in data analysis requires judgment and creativity by observing that since each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique to that particular study. Therefore, every stage of the qualitative inquiry depends on the researcher's skills, training, insights, and capabilities (Patton, 2015).

The researcher applied the transcendental phenomenological procedure Moustakas (1994) outlined in analyzing the data collected in this study. The thorough and transparent description of the analytic approach in this section was intended to help the reader understand the procedures followed to examine textual data and uncover essential meanings. Regardless of the specific procedures observed, the object of all qualitative approaches must fairly represent and communicate the data and all that they reveal (Patton, 2015).

Next, the researcher identified the meaning units found in the data by examining the coded statements and setting aside any statements that do not contain critical information for understanding the experience or are redundant (Moustakas, 1984). Any remaining significant statements that are found to be vague will be removed. In repeated readings of the interviews, the researcher will refine the data coding until one feels confident of having assembled the statements that comprise what Moustakas refers to as the invariant constituents for that participant. Next, the invariant constituents for a given participant will be grouped based on the core aspects of the experience, and these are the basis of the initial codes identified. The result should be a distilled description of one participant. The researcher repeated these steps for each of the participants. The codes were compiled in the database topically and linked to relevant passages in the data of the remaining participants. The code pool was organized into categories as each participant's data was analyzed. The researcher continued refining this code list as additional interview data were entered, read, and analyzed for topical categories (Creswell, 2003). When the last interview was added to the database, the researcher refined the code list five times.

The data analysis process began following the first interview and continued until the research findings were written (Creswell, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data analysis continues until the research question is fully answered. This study's primary data management tool was NVivo, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. Although the program enhances the coding process, some data analysis had to be completed using

Word and multiple sessions of cut-and-paste to gain as many perspectives as possible. NVivo also facilitated transcribing each interview and organized the data effectively.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The bedrock of high-quality qualitative research, trustworthiness, is the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used in qualitative research. To be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017). Determining the level of scientific rigor of a qualitative study requires different measures than those used in quantitative research. Because of the subjectivity within qualitative research, the researcher must employ extreme rigor to meet the necessary standards of rigor and trustworthiness (Cypress, 2017). When performing data analysis, the researcher must satisfy four criteria to establish the trustworthiness of a qualitative study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stadlander, 2015; Cypress, 2017). As explained in the paragraphs below, achieving trustworthiness requires many measures to be executed throughout the data analysis juncture.

Credibility

Credibility deals with the quality of addressing the study data and its intended focus (Elo et al., 2014). Several strategies go into establishing credibility, such as triangulation, i.e., the use of multiple methods or data sources to develop a

comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Patton, 1999), prolonged contact or engagement, i.e., spending extended time with the participants in order to gain a better insight into the phenomenon, member checks, i.e., returning the results to the participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences of the phenomenon, saturation, i.e., determining when there is adequate data from a study to develop a robust and valid understanding of the study phenomenon, reflexivity, i.e., acknowledging the researcher's role in the research, and peer review, i.e., subjecting the researcher's research to the scrutiny of others scholars (Cypress, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

When dealing with the transferability of qualitative research, the vital question a researcher must ask oneself is whether the findings are generalizable. If the answer is affirmative, the question is to what degree the results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Among the appropriate strategies to establish transferability is a thick description, i.e., providing detailed reports and interpretations of the situations observed by the researcher as well as writing detailed narratives or 'vignettes' to explain situations and their 'context.' An additional applicable strategic approach is commonly known as variation in selecting participants, for example, assembling participants with a wide range of viewpoints for a comprehensive look at the phenomenon under scrutiny. Transferability is more often than not contrasted with quantitative research external validity. Transferability is contingent not only on how persuasive the study is but, more importantly, on whether the research can be generalized and transferred to different contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is the analog of reliability in the quantitative study. Dependability is the umbrella term for practical strategic approaches to establishing dependability. These may include, other than triangulation (as mentioned earlier), what is known as audit trails, a transparent account of the steps taken from the very start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings. Elo et al. (2014) explain that dependability deals with whether the data will stay unaltered with the passage of time under different conditions, i.e., would the study's findings be repeated in a new study if a researcher used the same or similar participants. For the study to ensure dependability, it must be congruent with the research questions, which, in turn, must be straightforward.

Confirmability

The confirmability of a qualitative study is parallel to the objectivity of quantitative research. Establishing confirmability involves strategic measures such as reflexivity (as described above). Confirmability is contingent on the researcher's capability to objectively evaluate one's agenda and bias and foresee the dangers of imposing these biases onto the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As Lewis (2009) recommends, one way to achieve that is by the researcher detailing how one controls for one's own assumptions, beliefs, and potential biases. That is, as Cypress (2017) put it, thorough reflexivity through journaling and self-reflection.

Ethical Procedures

When working with a vulnerable group of individuals, it is imperative to prepare for ethical issues that may arise. Participants must be protected, and the researcher must not do anything to marginalize them further (Creswell, 2009). The researcher applied for and obtained Walden University Institutional Review Board permission (Approval no. 03-03-23-0669505) to conduct this study before starting the recruitment process. Before collecting data in the present study, the researcher asked all participants to read and sign an informed consent form that included (a) important information about the study, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the university, (d) an indication of how the participants are chosen, (e) the purpose and benefits of the research, (f) specifics about the participant's level of involvement, (g) the identification of any risks to the participant, (h) guaranteed confidentiality, (i) the assurance that withdrawal from the study can happen at any time, and, finally, (j) a list of persons to contact should question arise (Creswell, 2009).

The present study included extensive interviews with older individuals protected against ethical infractions. APA's general principles served as an ethical foundation for the present study. When working with vulnerable participants, it is essential to be prepared for any unexpected problems resulting from the interview. For example, a participant may lament his poor social life or other physical or psychological challenges. In order to provide support for each participant, before the commencement of the interview, all of the interviewees were given a list of local and national community health agencies. Therefore, should problems arise, the researcher could refer them to the list for help. When participants were given informed consent about the study before being

interviewed, the researcher also discussed the limits of confidentiality because one is mandated to report any elder abuse or elder neglect that one may become aware of due to the nature of the profession. This process follows the edicts of beneficence and nonmaleficence.

One of the researcher's duties as a student researcher is to create trust with each participant (Patton, 2015). The researcher clarified one's role as the interviewer and provided the participants with information about the study and the implications of their participation. The researcher also needed to consult with the chair and committee members before making decisions when preparing for the interviews.

For data protection, each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. All interviews were transcribed and printed out to begin coding. The electronic data, i.e., computer files of interviews, were kept on a separate password-protected flash drive and, along with the printed material, were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. The flash drive and documents will remain in the researcher's possession for seven years and then be destroyed.

Summary

This current chapter tracked down the research method from selecting transcendental phenomenology through the participant sampling process, the data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, the steps taken to ensure scientific rigor, and the role of the researcher. Transcendental phenomenology was the best research method to answer the study's research question. The sampling criteria targeted information-rich participants who included individuals aged 65 and over living by the

spiritual principles and practices of The Christian Community principles. The researcher collected data primarily through in-depth interviews. NVivo software helped analyze the data, following transcendental phenomenological procedures. The themes and meanings that emerge about the lived spirituality of aging individuals will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the spiritual needs of older adults (65+) by exploring the lived spiritual experience of older adults who live by the principles and practices of The Christian Community, founded in Switzerland in 1922. The overarching research question “How do older people describe their lived spiritual experience and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey?” aimed to investigate the older adults’ subjective experiences of their lived spirituality and how it impacted their aging journey. Embedded within the broader inquiry are two specific subquestions: (a) How do older adults who practice the spiritual principles and practices of The Christian Community perceive their spiritual experience as they age? This question seeks to understand the evolution of their spirituality along the aging journey; and (b) What is the essence of the spiritual experience these individuals encounter as they advance in age?

Before presenting the study’s findings, information on the data collection and analysis procedures will be discussed to assess their trustworthiness. A summary of the steps taken to record, track, and analyze the data will provide evidence of the quality of the procedures followed during this study and support the reported findings. Greater detail of the procedures was provided in Chapter 3. The evidence of quality will be followed by presenting the study’s findings as they relate to the research question, arranged within themes. Data samples (participant quotations) to support each theme as needed are included, while nonconforming data are identified and discussed. This chapter will also have a summary of the evidence of quality and discuss the procedure of data

analysis that was used in the study, the essential themes of the phenomenon that were uncovered, and how these themes address the lived spiritual experience of aging adults in the study population.

Research Setting

To recruit participants from The Christian Community churches, the researcher used purposive sampling (i.e., a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected because they have characteristics the researcher needs in the sample) and snowballing recruitment (i.e., a sampling technique whereby study participants refer additional candidates). In phenomenology, the subjects are individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Groenwald, 2004). To assemble a list of potential information-rich recruits for the research, the author visited the websites of various Christian Community churches that could be found online and compiled a list of 38 church administrators whose email addresses were on the various websites of churches and religious centers. Invitations to participate were addressed to these church leaders not in their capacity as functionaries of a “faith institution,” but solely as individual believers who happened to meet the study’s inclusion criteria, irrespective of their specific role in their organization.

A purposeful sample consisted of eight older adults ages 65 through 81 who were deeply immersed in the principles and practices of their Church. Saturation sampling is a purposeful strategy for dealing with the small sample size problem (Patton, 2015). The candidates were asked to complete an emailed screening questionnaire to determine eligibility and were then contacted and told whether they were selected to participate.

Participants' eligibility for this qualitative study was contingent on meeting the following inclusion criteria: (a) being a member of the "Christian Community" church; (b) being aged 65 years or older; (c) speaking English fluently.

The participants' age range, 65–81, encompass the years immediately following the traditional retirement age of 65 and include the oldest baby boomers. The sample of eight participants provided sufficient variety in experience to synthesize an overall meaning, enabled the researcher to answer the research question with rich detail, and fit within the sample size decisions of similar phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007; Groenwald, 2004). A snapshot of the participants' demographic data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants Data Description

Participant identifier	Age	Marital status	Financial support	Race	Previous affiliation
P1	67	Divorced	Investments/work	White	Presbyterian
P2	71	Widowed	Retirement income	White	Baptist
P3	67	Divorced	Work income	White	Esoteric
P4	70	Married	Retirement/work	White	Catholic
P5	69	Married	Work income	White	Protestant
P6	80	Married	Work income	White	Catholic
P7	68	Divorced	Retirement/work	Black	Agnostic
P8 ^a	78	Divorced	Retirement/work	White	Catholic
P9	81	Married	Retirement/work	White	Jewish

^a Withdrew from the study due to onset of medical problems unrelated to the research.

Data Collection

The intense and lengthy interviewing process inherent to a phenomenological study reduces the number of participants needed; thus, qualitative studies have no sample size rules (Patton, 2015). The eight individuals selected form a purposeful sample that encapsulates the period immediately following retirement age for Social Security, a

significant milestone along the aging journey. The makeup of the study sample, thus, forms a coherent cohort who had sufficient time to experience aging without having the health challenges typical of later years. This aspect was necessary for fulfilling the tenet of phenomenological research requiring sufficient time beyond the experience for participants to reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and memories of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Participant information was collected in two ways: (a) emailed questionnaires preceding the in-depth interviews in the form of a screening questionnaire and (b) person-to-person recorded telephone interviews. The strategy of using a qualitative methodology of interviewing and observation provided the researcher with the chance to explore the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived spiritual phenomenon for the study's group of participants and to draw out from the participants' descriptions the essence of their experiences and understand what those experiences meant to them (see Langdrige, 2007).

The researcher employed journaling before, during, and after each interview to track emerging understandings and observations. My notes also facilitated the epoche process, helping the researcher to identify and bracket personal biases and expectations throughout the data collection and analysis procedures (Moustakas, 1994). In the epoche process, a researcher seeks to "set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated" (Moustakas, p. 22). Other records include a pseudonym log used to anonymize participants' identity, receipt of their

consent form, and answered pre-in-depth interview questionnaires, phone calls, emails, the date of their interview, and follow-up contacts.

To track the development of codes, themes, and subthemes, the researcher maintained original interview transcripts and copies of each level of data processing during the analysis procedures. Additional means used to ensure quality included recordings of interviews that were repeatedly revisited to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. The multiple readings of interview transcripts and my notes helped capture each participant's verbal and nonverbal data. Participants reviewed their interview transcripts and provided feedback that ensured the data were accurately reported. NVivo was used to code data in each interview (Laverly, 2003; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). The researcher read and re-read coded segments until the understanding of each participant's experience was accomplished and then compared segments across participants. Following the transcendental phenomenological procedures enabled the researcher to identify the phenomenon's essence and note nonconforming missing information.

Data Analysis

Following the iterative process of reading repeatedly (with a naïve understanding), the researcher worked up towards a structural analysis until themes on the different questions began to crystallize pertaining to passages or meaning units identified in the interviews that signified subthemes and themes of the phenomenon (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). After this extensive iterative process, the researcher embarked on themes creation. Subsequently, the themes were populated with essential passages or meaning units identified in the interviews. This action resulted in a

cluster of subthemes and themes pertaining to the study’s phenomenon essence (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

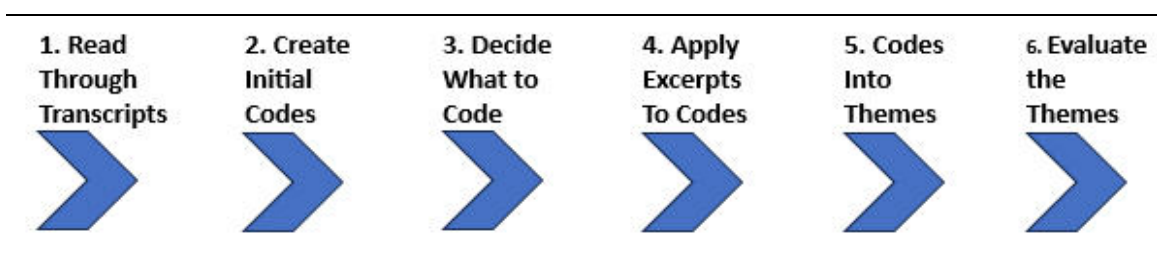
Thematic Data Analysis

The researcher used Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis method (see Kiger & Varpio, 2020) to conduct this analysis, as illustrated in Figure 2. Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis method is an iterative process consisting of six steps: (a) becoming familiar with the data, (b) generating codes, (c) generating themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) locating exemplars (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Producing the report means telling the complex story of the themes, first describing the meaning within each theme, with illustrative examples, and then looking across themes to discern connective takeaways or meta-themes.

Figure 2

The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis



Note. Designed by the author.

A theme is a “patterned response or meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) derived from the data that informs the research question—viewed in opposition to a subtheme, which provides description and organization to the “manifest content” of a data set. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that a theme captures a prominent aspect of the data in a patterned way “regardless of whether that theme captures the majority experience”

(Scharp & Sanders, 2019, p. 1). The theme is a more abstract entity involving more data interpretation and integration (Nowell et al., 2017).

Though identifying a pattern might entail noticing frequency, it is primarily about meaning-making, not underscoring quantity. There is no “hard-and-fast answer to the question of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). In other words, the identified themes address the research question, even if not every participant addresses the theme per se. After categorizing themes within the in-depth interview protocol with older adults, the researcher found six primary themes, with several subthemes identified with each primary theme (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants’ Spiritual Interviews

The researcher categorized themes identified within each interview question from the interview protocol with older adults. There were six major themes, with several subthemes identified with each major (essential) theme (see Figure 3). The six major themes that emerged about spirituality across the interviews with older adults were (a) reframing self-identity, (b) reframing one’s habitat, (c) connecting with inner values, (d) finding meaning and purpose, (e) mindfulness and acceptance, and (f) transcending materialism.

Below is a discussion of each major theme and subthemes related to the primary themes the researcher found to answer the research question, “How do older people describe their lived spiritual experience and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey?”

Figure 3*Final Data Themes*

Major themes with subthemes
I Reframing Self-Identity
Transformative Encounters and Self-Rediscovery
Transcending Material Boundaries and Exploring Spiritual Realms
Rediscovering Self Through Spiritual Awakening
Broadening Self-Identity Through Interfaith Exploration
Nurturing Self-Identity Through Religious Roots
II Reframing One's Habitat
Authenticity and Belonging
Community as a Haven for Emotional Support
Intergenerational Unity and Inclusivity
Spiritual Sanctuary and Interconnectedness
III Connecting with Inner Values
Morality and Purpose in Faith.
Transformation of Personal Ethics
Guided by Moral Consequences
Commitment to Moral Responsibility
Alignment with Creative Faith
IV Finding Meaning and Purpose
Spiritual Fulfillment and Communal Connection
Service and Gratification
Spiritual Connection and Self-Reflection
Adversity and Personal Growth
V Mindfulness and Acceptance
Truth and Transparency
Continuous Growth and Self-Reflection
Personal Responsibility and Agency
Personal Accountability and Empowerment
Forgiveness and Healing
VI Transcending Materialism
Exploration of the Metaphysical
Faith as a Guiding Principle
Spiritual Guidance and Synchronicity
Spiritual Transformation and Divine Emulation

Theme I: Reframing Self-Identity

The first theme, reframing self-identity, involves a transformative technique of the self, leading an individual to reinterpret one's identity, biography, and daily behaviors in the light of a new cultural model. It acknowledges that self-identity is not a static, singular entity but a complex mosaic of interconnected facets. As noted above, five subthemes related to this theme emerged from the participants' interviews: (a) transformative encounters and self-rediscovery, (b) transcending material boundaries and exploring spiritual realms, (c) rediscovering self through spiritual awakening, (d) broadening self-identity through interfaith exploration and (e) nurturing self-identity through religious roots.

Transformative Encounters and Self-Rediscovery. When asked to identify early significant spiritual life events, many participants recalled various aspects of personal growth and spiritual development, such as the following profound turning point in the life of an 81-year-old participant (P9), a retired professor recalling a period of self-discovery and exploration, where his life felt meaningless, and he contemplated drastic actions. However, the encounter with the woman who would become their wife marked a new beginning, symbolizing the process of self-rediscovery and the reshaping of their self-identity:

I went to Graduate School. ... I got swept up in what was happening there and took LSD. ... I experienced the tangible presence of Infinity. And that experience rendered everything I was doing ... meaningless. I ... began worrying about whether I would take my own life. That experience lasted for a while, ... I met a

woman, my wife, 50 or 55 years ago. And that was the beginning of everything turning around.

Another participant, 68 years old (P7), shared a transformative experience while in a chapel, looking at a crucifix, during which he felt a profound sense of truth and spiritual awakening. This incident represents a pivotal moment that took him by surprise and set him on a quest to explore his own path within Christianity. It highlights how a single, intense encounter with a religious symbol or idea can profoundly reshape a person's self-identity and spiritual journey. It further emphasizes the transformative power of such encounters and how they can lead individuals to reframe their self-identity as they embark on a more personalized and deeply spiritual exploration within their faith:

I was waiting for [a friend] in the Chapel. And while in the Chapel, I looked up and saw a large crucifix. And while looking at the crucifix, something swept over me that said, "This is true!" And that incident took me quite by surprise and became like the opening that set me looking for my own way in Christianity.

Transcending Material Boundaries and Exploring Spiritual Realms. In reflecting on their spiritual journey, some participants discussed their journey of expanding their understanding beyond the material world and traditional religious interpretations to explore more mystical and spiritual aspects of life. For one participant (P5), this exploration represented a significant shift in his self-identity as he moved from a surface-level, faith-based perspective to one rooted in a deep understanding and a broader spiritual worldview, reflecting a reframing and redefining of self-identity:

Learning about things like Destiny and karma, the more mystical aspects of what Christ accomplished, as opposed to simply being face based but being supported by understanding. I understood and recognized that there's more to life than what meets the senses. There's also another world, a spiritual world that, with the help of a proper teacher and with an open mind, one can evaluate and decide if it makes sense.

Rediscovering Self Through Spiritual Awakening. Another participant (P4), a 70-year-old female, described a transformative experience in which she experienced a spiritual awakening, a profound shift in her self-identity as she shared an experience of hearing ethereal music, which she attributes to opening herself up to the “music of the spheres.” This spiritual awakening marked a transformative period in her life, wherein she moved from an ordinary existence to one filled with a higher sense of purpose and connection to the spiritual realm. The music's uplifting and sustaining nature suggests that this experience was pivotal in reshaping her self-identity, aligning her more closely with her spiritual side, and underscores her journey of self-discovery through a spiritual awakening, emphasizing how such experiences can lead to a profound reframing of one's self-identity:

During that time, I started hearing music in my head. I just woke up one morning, and I felt like I was listening to somebody chanting, so I talked to James [her mentor] about this, and he said I had opened myself up to hearing what is called the music of the spheres. It was beautiful chanting-like music and was very uplifting and helped sustain me.

Broadening Self-Identity Through Interfaith Exploration. Explaining a transformative experience in their spiritual journey, a number of interviewees, such as a 72-year-old interviewee (P2), described a significant shift in her self-identity as she moved beyond the confines of her own religious denomination and actively engaged in interfaith dialogues. This transformative journey made her appreciate the diversity of spiritual experiences and broadened her “understanding of God’s work.” Here, the participant’s self-identity evolved from being tied to a specific religious tradition to a more inclusive and diverse perspective, redefining her self-identity by embracing interfaith experiences and leading to a profound shift in how one perceives themselves and their place in the world:

My spiritual journey expanded beyond the walls of my own denomination. I started engaging in interfaith dialogues and learning from people of different religious backgrounds. This opened my heart to appreciate the diversity of spiritual experiences and broadened my understanding of God’s work in the world.

Nurturing Self-Identity Through Religious Roots. Some volunteers invoked their spiritual roots when talking about their spiritual journey. For example, interviewee (P3), a 67-year-old retired priest reflecting on his upbringing in the Presbyterian Church, described how, in hindsight, he viewed it as a significant part of his spiritual journey. The participant highlighted that, despite common perceptions, the church served as a place where he felt a deep connection to something greater and purer than the world around

him. This recollection suggests that his self-identity was influenced by his religious roots, which provided him with a sense of purpose, belonging, and connection to the divine:

I grew up in the Presbyterian Church in southern Missouri. And for me, that was the spirit of part of my spiritual journey. I know that churches are not always thought of as spiritual. But looking back, I realize that that was always a place where I felt a connection to something bigger and higher and pure, more pure, than the world around me, whether it was the singing or the praying, or the reading, I don't know exactly how that worked back in the day.

Theme II: Reframing One's Habitat

The theme of "reframing one's habitat" involves a transformative process where individuals seek to adapt and reconfigure their social, physical, or emotional environments by reshaping their spaces, creating new connections, finding acceptance, or pursuing personal growth to consciously modify one's surroundings to promote personal growth, fulfillment, and a sense of belonging. Under this theme, the researcher identified four subthemes that illuminated what reframing one's habitat meant to participants: (a) authenticity and belonging, (b) community as a haven for emotional support, (c) intergenerational unity and inclusivity, and (d) spiritual sanctuary and interconnectedness.

Authenticity and Belonging. Acceptance and authenticity contribute to a sense of belonging and connection, facilitating a positive shift in one's social environment, a key aspect of "Reframing One's Habitat." As interviewee (P2) highlighted, by being in a community where you can be truly authentic and where you can be your true self, you are

effectively reframing your habitat to one that encourages self-expression, belonging, and personal growth. Thus, you are not just existing within a physical environment but actively participating in reshaping your habitat to be more in line with your authentic self, promoting a sense of belonging and personal fulfillment:

With people that you resonate with, you'll notice you're not alone. It's really important sometimes. So just yesterday, as an example, I had been asked to be the witness at a wedding in another congregation. And it was remarkable that it was just possible to sit there and be myself.

Community as a Haven for Emotional Support. Some interviewees, like (P7), described the faith community as a basement for community services, offering support and strengthening the community. This act of generosity and providing a space for communal gatherings illustrate how individuals can reframe their habitat to foster a stronger sense of community and a reconfiguration of one's social surroundings to prioritize support and a sense of community:

Sharing our burdens with trusted friends, mentors, or members of our church community can provide a safe space for vulnerability, prayer, and wise counsel. ...

I was asked by friends to become godfather to one of their children. ...

Community services were only held in the Twin Cities every few months. And they no longer had a place to hold the service. And I have offered them my basement in the house that I lived in.

Intergenerational Unity and Inclusivity. The idea that older and younger generations are treated equally within the community and engage in meaningful

conversations and interactions reflects a sense of unity and inclusivity among different age groups, reshaping the habitat to create an environment where people of all generations can coexist harmoniously. Implicitly providing a reinterpretation of aging is akin to reframing one's habitat, allowing older adults to view this stage of life as part of a journey and encouraging the suggestion made by the interviewee (P9) that old age loses much of its negative connotations:

Older adults are not treated any differently than younger people. We do that across generations. One thing about the community that is quite wonderful, I see this all the time on Sunday, after church, before church; I see a conversation between an 80-year-old person and a 17-year-old. That's going on all the time. That's great. And that's not something I experienced as a child at all.

Spiritual Sanctuary and Interconnectedness. This subtheme underscores the idea that reframing one's habitat is not limited to the physical environment but can also be the creating of supportive and spiritually enriching spaces within the community, enabling older adults to find solace, connection, and a renewed sense of belonging. Reflecting on how the faith community supports older adults, participants underscored the idea that community support is not limited to practical things but, more importantly, extends to the creation of supportive and spiritually enriching spaces within the community, enabling older adults to find solace, connection, and a renewed sense of belonging. In this context, interviewee (P3) cited various services:

Getting caught up in practical things with older people is straightforward because they often need it ... they need a ride somewhere or someone to help out in the

household. And all of that sort of thing ... visiting and talking to people, discussing spiritual matters openly, discussing what we'll uplift his soul, and how you understand each little life to keep that process alive, that's very important for the community.

Theme III: Connecting with Inner Values

The theme "connecting with inner values" refers to an individual's embarking on a profound journey of self-exploration and personal growth by delving into their core values to align one's actions, decisions, and life choices with these values as a means of finding purpose, fulfillment, and a sense of direction in life tapping into their inner compass and using it as a guiding light for making meaningful choices. Under this theme, the researcher identified five subthemes that illuminated what connecting with inner values means to participants: (a) morality and purpose in faith, (b) transformation of personal ethics, (c) guided by moral consequences, (d) commitment to moral responsibility, and (e) alignment with creative faith.

Morality and Purpose in Faith. When reflecting on the faith aspect of spirituality, the bulk of participants described having a rich history with a particular church or denomination. A shared experience within this cohort is reflected in similar stories about how faith has influenced their understanding of morality. Their faith affects almost everything they do, including moral decisions, indicating a strong connection between their inner values in the following excerpt from (P6):

Almost nothing I do isn't in some way affected by my faith, my understanding of how the world works in a Christian sense. And that includes wrestling with

questions of morality as well as interpreting what's going on in the world, and the historical process and what's happening with the changes in human consciousness that we experience, underlined by the feeling that everything happening has a purpose.

Transformation of Personal Ethics. This subtheme highlights the profound impact of inner values on one's conduct and how these values can evolve over time, as seen in A 67-year-old male volunteer (P1) who recalled a shift away from telling white lies and taking a more truthful approach in her communication, gaining a deeper understanding of herself and referred to undergoing fundamental ethical growth on her spiritual path by transitioning towards truthfulness and moral behavior:

Faith, for me it's more like an inner knowing. For instance, I never used to think anything of telling little white lies whenever it was warranted. I didn't think that was any big deal. The more I got on the spiritual path, the more I kind of naturally quit doing that. I would avoid telling any untruths, any white lies. Sometimes I would just avoid saying untruths or word things a little differently, so it wasn't a lie. But that kind of just became more natural and easier to do.

Guided by Moral Consequences. A few spoke about their decision-making being conducted by the concept of Karma, which is a moral and ethical principle often associated with Eastern spiritual and philosophical traditions. The mention of "good karma" and "bad karma" reflects a deep connection with inner values and a solid moral compass. One participant (P7) recounted how he moved away from being potentially hurtful to others and became a better person and parent in his desire to do good. His focus

on personal development and becoming a better person is indicative of her commitment to aligning his actions with his inner values:

If I'm going to do something, am I creating good karma or bad karma? That's something that really helped guide me. I want to do good rather than, you know, create any bad karma... I knew I could be hurtful at times to other people. That part of me just fell away. I became a better person. I also became a better parent.

Commitment to Moral Responsibility. To some participants, such as a 69-year-old priest (P5), connecting with inner values meant fulfilling one's duties even in challenging situations, reflecting his inner resolve to stay true to his word, and demonstrating his commitment to moral responsibility as an integral part of his character empowering him to carry out his duty, even when faced with personal doubts:

And when I got up with the sermon and look out into the congregation, and I had a sudden moment: I don't think I could get the sermon now and then, my other 'self' said. Well, you have to because you said you would, and you're already standing there. This was a moment where I realized no matter what happens to me personally in my personal karma if you want to use a big word, I'm always going to be able to do what's necessary to get it done. That was a kind of a resolution or a promise.

Alignment with Creative Faith. Reflecting on how one's faith impacts daily life and decision-making, participants expressed faith in a creative power at the center of the universe, a deep belief in the creative and transformative potential of individuals and the universe. In the words of interviewee (P7):

I believe in the essential power at the center of the universe and at the center of every single human being who is the creative power. As he works to develop creation further, the main goal is to create, maintain, and develop. That's my faith. And that faith actually informs everything I do.

Theme IV: Finding Meaning and Purpose

The theme “finding meaning and purpose” explores the profound and timeless quest for a sense of direction and fulfillment in life by embarking on a journey of self-discovery, where they seek to unearth their unique purpose and cultivate a deeper understanding of what gives their life meaning using introspection, reflection, and action toward a more purposeful and meaningful existence. This third major theme was related to each participant's exploration of how individuals derive meaning and purpose through various avenues, including their spiritual roles, relationships with God, and personal challenges. The researcher discovered the following four subthemes: (a) spiritual fulfillment and communal connection, (b) service and gratification, (c) spiritual connection and self-reflection, and (d) adversity and personal growth.

Spiritual Fulfillment and Communal Connection. When asked to contemplate how they find purpose and meaning in their life, a few participants recalled key adolescent moments when they decided to commit their spiritual lives to God. Some narratives, like participant (P3), reflected the sense of purpose and meaning through their role as priests, highlighting the idea that finding meaning and purpose in life can be intrinsically linked to spiritual fulfillment and the sense of belonging to a larger, transcendent community, the gathering of people to experience a shared, spiritual

dimension that transcends the physical world, serving as a source of profound meaning and purpose for those who engage in it:

My purpose and meaning in life are to fulfill my priesthood, which is maintaining the spiritual life, as we discussed in the last question. Carrying out the liturgy is a crucial part of the priestly work. That may help preserve the life of the Christian community, as we said earlier, how the liturgy is the place where. The people meet where the community comes together and where it is. It's heart and mind to this. Part of the universe that is bigger and broader and not always accessible with physical senses.

Service and Gratification. Other participants described more random or unplanned events, service, and spiritual calling, focusing on one's gratitude and fulfillment when being of help in one's role as a priest, emphasizing how these moments contribute to one's sense of purpose and meaning. For others, like interviewee (P9), his willingness to be available and grateful for the opportunity to counsel a couple exemplifies how their role as a priest provides a source of meaning and purpose through service to their community and the personal satisfaction they derive from it:

Anytime I have an opportunity to be of some help, as long as my forces allow me to do it, I'm thankful whenever someone asks me to do something related to my being a priest. So, just before you called, I met with a couple who came and needed some counseling. Not only was I available for them, but I was very grateful that they came.

Spiritual Connection and Self-Reflection. Some of the narratives centered on the individual's quest for meaning and purpose through one's personal relationship with God, achieved through prayer, study, and reflection. In the case of volunteer (P5), the act of prayer, study, and meditation allows him to connect with something greater than herself (God) and, in the process, recognize the significance of faith, grace, and blessings in his life. This subtheme highlights that finding meaning and purpose can be a profoundly personal and spiritual endeavor driven by the exploration of one's relationship with the divine and self-reflection on life's experiences:

Moreover, I find purpose and meaning in deepening my personal relationship with God through prayer, study, and reflection... Reflecting on God's faithfulness throughout my life and recognizing His grace and blessings.

Adversity and Personal Growth. Here, an 80-year-old male participant (P6) shares an intimate story from his life chart. He finds purpose and meaning in his struggles with diabetes by viewing it as an opportunity for personal growth and addressing spiritual aspects of life, and turning being a type one diabetic into part of his journey in coping with the challenges of how adversity has become a source of personal growth and self-discovery. The daily struggle with diabetes has become a vehicle for personal development, an exploration of the purpose of one's existence, and a catalyst for a deeper understanding of what it means to be human and how to find meaning in life's challenges:

I am a type one diabetic, which came early in my life and has been a struggle and a constant burden, a source of stress for me, my wife, and my children. I've had to

find a way to meet this almost daily with the sense of learning the purpose of my becoming a human being. And so everything we experience in life offers us [the opportunity] to become more human.

Theme V: Mindfulness and Acceptance

The “mindfulness and acceptance” theme revolves around the practice of mindfulness and the art of embracing the present moment and cultivating mindfulness as a tool for self-awareness, stress reduction, and personal growth through the acceptance of both one and the circumstances of life, as a foundation for greater well-being and contentment. This fifth major theme was related to the seriousness of being mindful and accepting of the truth, each participant’s, even if it may be uncomfortable or difficult to confront and encourages individuals to acknowledge and accept the reality of their actions and the consequences of secrecy, ultimately emphasizing the value of mindfulness and acceptance in facing uncomfortable truths and seeking personal growth and transformation. The researcher discovered the following four subthemes: (a) truth and transparency, (b) continuous growth and self-reflection, (c) personal responsibility and agency, and (d) forgiveness and healing.

Truth and Transparency. Prompted to mention the most important life lessons learned, most participants recalled innocent key adolescent moments of being willing to question, learn, and continue seeking truth and nurturing my spiritual journey (P3), alluded to the idea that hidden or secret aspects of life will eventually be revealed and brought to light. Acknowledging that hidden truths will subsequently come to light encourages individuals to be more aware of their choices and actions, fostering a sense of

mindfulness in their behavior, leading to personal growth and a more authentic way of living:

If you go back to saying at least one thing, that Jesus Christ says all secrets will be revealed. Everything that has been said in the darkness will come to the light. ...

Very good to bring those out into the light from time to time.

Continuous Growth and Self-Reflection. Other participants like (P7), highlighted being mindful of their own limitations and acknowledged the need for ongoing self-reflection and personal growth while accepting one's imperfections and the willingness to question and adapt one's beliefs and behaviors, underscoring the idea that mindfulness involves a constant journey of self-awareness and growth, promoting the acceptance of one's flaws and the commitment to continuous improvement and making this an essential part of one's journey:

I haven't learned anything. I want to still be open to learning ... to not flip into dogmatic ideas or preconceived notions and to be open to what people tell me, to question my own experience, and to look at parts of myself that I still need to work on, which is, basically, everything.

Personal Responsibility and Agency. Other interviewees, like (P1), emphasized being mindful of their own responsibility actions and reactions to life's challenges, highlighting one's own agency and taking responsibility for one's actions and responses even when faced with circumstances beyond one's control. One can choose how to respond, being aware that those responses may profoundly impact the unfolding of events

in one's life and thus empowering oneself to navigate life's ups and downs with greater self-awareness and personal agency:

The most important one [lesson] is that I am responsible for everything I do in response to the things that come toward me. I can't always control what happens. But I can manage my response. And my response to what comes toward me will probably influence the next thing that turns toward me. That has been a vital life lesson. I'm responsible for myself and nobody else. I can't blame my parents, can't blame the government, can't blame my next-door neighbor. It's me.

Forgiveness and Healing. One participant (P5) spoke of becoming mindful of the power of forgiveness as a tool for personal and spiritual growth, recognizing the burden of grudges and the liberation that forgiveness brings. By forgiving both others and oneself, (P5) experiences healing, restoration, and reconciliation, demonstrating the profound impact of forgiveness on one's spiritual and emotional well-being. This subtheme reinforces the idea that mindfulness involves recognizing the role of forgiveness in our lives and actively choosing to extend it to achieve acceptance and inner peace:

I have learned the power of forgiveness and the freedom it brings. Holding onto grudges and harboring bitterness only serves to weigh us down and hinder our spiritual growth. As I've aged, I've learned that extending forgiveness, both to others and to myself, is a transformative act that brings healing and liberation. Embracing the example of Christ's forgiveness has allowed me to experience a

deeper level of peace, restoration, and reconciliation in my relationships and within my own heart.

Theme VI: Transcending Materialism

The theme “Transcending Materialism” refers to when an individual explores a deeper dimension of life beyond pursuing material wealth and possessions, reflecting on the significance of non-material aspects of existence, such as inner fulfillment, spiritual growth, human connections, and the pursuit of meaning and purpose challenging the prevailing culture of consumerism and inviting a shift towards a more soulful, enriched, and purpose-driven life. Under this final major theme, the researcher identified four subthemes: (a) exploration of the metaphysical, (b) faith as a guiding principle, (c) spiritual guidance and synchronicity, and (d) spiritual transformation and divine emulation.

Exploration of the Metaphysical. Asked to contemplate their spiritual journey, most participants described eye-opening stories related to a world they never knew that influenced their understanding of it and opened their minds to the idea that there is something beyond the purely physical and material world. One participant, aged 67 (P3), offered the story of an encounter with a numerologist. The latter’s accurate readings opened the participant’s mind to the idea that there is more to reality than just the physical, a key element of transcending materialism:

At age 28, I was a newspaper reporter, and I went to a talk by a man who was a numerologist. I wanted to do a story on him because he lived in the area ... that I covered. And listening to him talk, I started to feel almost like a past life

experience, like I knew him from before. I brought samples of other people's handwriting, like my mother, boyfriend, and boss. And after the class, I had him look at those and give me a little reading on them. And he was so accurate, he even told me what my mother was suffering from. So that was the beginning because it opened me up to another reality that there was something beyond just, you know, the physical.

Faith as a Guiding Principle. Other participants, such as (P1), highlighted their reliance on their faith to guide their actions and decision-making, particularly in challenging situations, underscoring transcending a purely materialistic or pragmatic approach by seeking guidance from their faith as a spiritual and moral compass that influences their choices and actions, emphasizing the importance of seeking guidance from a higher, non-material source when making decisions. This subtheme reinforces that transcending materialism often involves looking beyond the surface and seeking spiritual or moral principles to guide one's actions and choices:

Faith actually informs everything I do ... every time I approach a new situation. ... Let's take an example. I have to write a rather uncomfortable letter to one of our congregations about their priests. I ask continually along the way, sort of a trivial thing that goes around in religious circles nowadays, like, what would Jesus do?

Spiritual Guidance and Synchronicity. One interviewee (P4) underscored the idea of being open to a more spiritual and intuitive perspective, going beyond a purely materialistic worldview, and embracing the concept of being guided by forces beyond the

physical realm. She highlighted that there is a deeper, spiritual dimension to their experiences, whether through dreams, inspiration, or unexpected encounters, underscoring the belief in the presence of a guiding force or meaningful patterns in life that transcends pure materialism, inviting us to consider the role of spirituality and synchronicity in our existence:

I don't believe in my guardian Angel and that there is guidance. ... I feel like I'm being guided. I'm being led, and things come to me either through inspiration, dream, or Facebook, or something will pop out at me.

Spiritual Transformation and Divine Emulation. An eighty-year-old retired priest (P6) discussed the idea that individuals are encouraged to become like God, which is he sees as a profound and challenging aspiration that requires a spiritual transformation and the emulation of divine qualities as well as transcending materialism through the pursuit of spiritual growth and a more profound connection with the sacred. He suggests that this transformation often involves experiences, including those involving pain, which can be pivotal in one's spiritual journey:

But that's a long pass. He [referring to Jesus] said we should become like God [Ephesians 5, "So try to be like God, because you are his own dear children."], which is freaky. It will require lots of experience, especially the ones with pain. But that also has to do with the question of incarnation.

By applying various means, a level of credibility and trustworthiness has been attained in this study, including the application of systematic procedures and researcher transparency. The researcher and the interviewee constructed the credibility of the

research as the 'created text' from the eight interviews. The interviewee's voice was represented consistently throughout the study results. Furthermore, the interpretation involved repetitive readings of the texts, theme identification (analyses), reflection on how the themes answer the research questions, and a comparison to related literature that illuminated the phenomenon (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Moreover, the use of multiple data sources, typed notes/timelines, recorded interviews, transcribed records, and field notes ensured the rigor and credibility of the research.

However, the study has limitations and potential areas for improvement, which stem from the nature of qualitative research, the participant sampling technique, the transcendental phenomenology method, and the available resources. The purposeful sampling of qualitative research reduces the generalizability of findings (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2015). The present study's sample population is participants aged (≥ 65) who speak and understand English. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling (getting referrals for more participants from the older participants themselves) and word of mouth. Individuals who met the criteria and were not exposed to these recruitment methods could not be studied.

The results of this study cannot be generalized to the population of older adults. Nevertheless, the findings add meaningful information to the body of knowledge on spirituality and aging for this group. Participants may not have been candid about their spiritual practices. Some of the participants in this study may have exaggerated how they are engaged in spirituality, in which case, the data collected may be compromised.

The procedural steps of transcendental phenomenology represented still another limitation. They required considerable time to complete more study participants flawlessly, including member checking to review interview transcriptions and verify study findings. Further, there will be differences between the study's sample of participants and the larger population of older adults. For example, the method used to interview participants limited the study since all interviews took place via telephone. There was no opportunity for the researcher to be in the participant's presence. Thus, the researcher was not exposed to the natural nonverbal information important in two-way communication. Although snowball sampling is adequate for hard-to-reach populations, study participants tend to refer to people like themselves, compromising diversity (Tracy, 2013). Overall, due to the phenomenological method, reporting was possible on only a small group of participants. It follows that the results cannot be generalizable to the larger population.

Summary

In this chapter, the author summarized evidence of the trustworthiness of the study, the sampling, and the participants. Participants' data description was given to help the reader distinguish among the personalities involved in the study. How data were recorded and tracked was summarized. Then, the findings of the study that addressed the research question were presented, first revealing preliminary data and then going through the major findings that fell into six themes: (a) Reframing Self-Identity, (b) Reframing One's Habitat, (c) Connecting with Inner Values, (d) Finding Meaning and Purpose, (e) Mindfulness and Acceptance and (f) Transcending Materialism. These themes tie the

fundamentals of “The Christian Community” to the experience of aging. The study’s overall finding was that the spirituality of “The Christian Community” equips its members with a positive attitude and proactive approach to facing the challenges of aging. In Chapter 5, the author will interpret the findings, relate the results to previous research and the conceptual framework, provide conclusions, discuss implications for social change, and offer recommendations for action and further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insights into the lived experience of spirituality of a sample of the older adult (i.e., ages 65 and above) American population and its relevance to assisting them over their life course. This chapter begins with an overview of why and how the study was completed, reviews the research question and the issues being addressed, and summarizes the findings reported in Chapter 4. The following section includes the interpretation of the findings and a discussion of how the findings relate to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework that guided the study. This presentation is followed by the conclusions drawn from this study and how they contribute to research on spirituality and aging. In the following section, the implications for social change are discussed. The remaining areas of this chapter cover recommendations for action and further research.

Study Overview

Two converging forces are reshaping the demographic landscape of the United States, gradually turning it into an increasingly aged society. The first of these forces stems from the aging of the baby boomer generation, resulting in a steady increase in the proportion of the population over the age of 65. In 1900, this demographic made up only 4.1% of the population, but projections indicate that by 2040, it is expected to surge to 20.4% (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004). The second dynamic at play is the prolonged lifespan of Americans. As adults approach the age of 65, they can now anticipate an additional 30 to 40 years of life (Butler, 2008). These demographic shifts

imply that a growing number of adults will experience an unprecedented span of years between midlife and the end of their journey.

Simultaneously, older individuals are confronted with ageism, perpetuated by inaccurate beliefs and societal expectations (Butler, 1969). Existing literature has provided compelling evidence that spirituality plays a vital role in successful aging (Boswell et al., 2006; Moberg, 2008; Moremen, 2005; Wink & Dillon, 2008). However, previous studies primarily focused on older adults with severe or chronic health conditions residing in nursing homes or assisted living facilities (e.g., Agli et al., 2018; Bishop et al., 2006; Flood & Scharer, 2006; Jopp & Rott, 2006). A noticeable gap exists in the literature when it comes to qualitative studies exploring the spirituality of older individuals in various life circumstances (Lepherd et al., 2020).

The central research question guiding this study was as follows: How do older people describe their lived experience of spirituality and its relevance to adapting to their aging journey? To answer this question, the study enlisted eight older adults ranging from 65 to 81 years of age who were deeply immersed in the principles and practices of The Christian Community Church. In pursuit of a holistic exploration of their experiences, the researcher employed a qualitative methodology, following the transcendental phenomenological approach outlined by Moustakas (1994). Data analysis involved the use of NVivo software and manual techniques until the essence of the spiritual experience of aging was distilled. The study's findings revealed several prominent themes: (a) reframing self-identity, (b) redefining one's habitat, (c) connecting with inner values, (d) discovering meaning and purpose, (e) practicing mindfulness and acceptance,

and (f) transcending materialism. The subsequent section delves into the interpretations of these findings within the context of existing literature and the theoretical framework.

Interpretation of Findings

The lived spiritual experience discussed in this section covers a vast range of ages, given that the participants were between 65 and 81. The study participants described a positive aging experience due primarily to their lived spirituality as followers of The Christian Community principles and practices, which shaped their worldview and influenced how they perceive and evaluate their aging journey. When specifically focused on spiritual reminiscence to confront age-related losses, challenges, and difficulties, these older adults experienced an enhanced presence of meaning in life (MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2010).

The participants in the study experienced sundry trials and hardships (e.g., loved ones suffering from diabetes, stroke, palsy, terminal illness, death of a spouse, death of a child, divorce) from the mid to later stages of adulthood. However, despite these adverse events, most participants expressed tremendous positive attitudes about spirituality and meaning in life (Horning et al., 2011). The following discussion is organized around the themes that emerged from the data, and it relates the data to the literature and the study's theoretical framework, finally leading to the study's conclusions.

Findings and the Literature

The study findings reveal that spirituality, as a coping mechanism, plays a pivotal transformational role in the lives of older adults in this study, particularly in the later stages of life, and is especially relevant when older adults face changes in role status and

identity, cope with an illness, deal with daily limitations, recover from a loss, and shift from a future orientation to a “here and now” focus (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Kaopua et al., 2007; Leder, 1999; Moberg, 2005). Within this transformation, encapsulated in the first central theme discovered by the study, reframing self-identity, individuals undergo a profound shift in how they perceive their life purpose as well as themselves. Rather than emphasizing conventional markers of success, such as financial independence or sports achievements prevalent at a young age, older adults in this study turned to spirituality to explore the deeper meaning of their existence.

This reevaluation of self-identity is closely intertwined with spiritual-religious coping, as Koenig (2002) outlined. Spiritual-religious coping is the use of religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices to alleviate emotional distress in response to stressful events, such as loss or life changes. One case in point is P9’s daily struggle with diabetes, both physically and mentally. When he started viewing his experience of pain through the lens of Christian teachings, as he tried to understand the purpose of his suffering, it became a vehicle for personal growth. Then, it expanded to an exploration of the meaning of one’s existence. These beliefs and practices offer a framework for understanding and making suffering more bearable. Instead of merely enduring hardship, individuals find meaning in their struggles through their spiritual beliefs, giving them the emotional strength to persevere.

An additional example of how reframing self-identity brought about a profound turning point is the transformative encounter of a participant, which led him to question the meaning and purpose of his life, suggesting a significant shift in his self-identity. Life

felt meaningless, and he contemplated drastic actions. However, the encounter with the woman who would become his wife marked a new beginning, symbolizing the process of self-rediscovery and the reshaping of his self-identity.

Studies by Barbarin (1993) and Hefti (2011) have highlighted the significance of spirituality in promoting an internal locus of control during stressful situations. When faced with life stressors, religious and spiritual activities serve as a means to reframe these events, motivating individuals to confront and navigate these challenges. Instead of feeling helpless and overwhelmed, they find solace and strength within their spiritual beliefs.

This transformation of self-identity is not merely a superficial change; it represents a fundamental shift in how older adults perceive their self-worth, self-respect, and pride. The focus moves from external achievements to serving a higher purpose. Serving God and prioritizing their spiritual journey become the pinnacle of their self-identity. In this process, they discover fulfillment in a different set of values, embracing their spiritual identity as the core of their being.

There were no differences between male and female participants in experiencing the transformation of self-identity and the practice of spiritual coping. As older adults reframed their self-identity, they also employed spiritual coping strategies to navigate life's challenges, such as praying, remembering that God is by one's side through a crisis, experiencing emotional intimacy within one's religious community, trusting in a larger spiritual plan for one's life. This integration allowed them to regulate their emotions during times of illness, change, and circumstances beyond their personal control. In

essence, spirituality becomes a guiding force in helping them cope with the inevitable adversities that come with aging.

For the older adults in the study, all churchgoers and church camp attendees, spirituality serves not only as a profound means of coping but also of reframing their social habitat, leading them to a deeper understanding of their self-worth, resilience, and purpose. The second central theme, reframing one's habitat, mirrors the profound transformation of the first, reframing self-identity in the lives of the study participants. As older adults redefine their physical, emotional, and spiritual environment, they undergo a paradigm shift in their understanding of their place in the world. Traditional settings like the business office or sports arena are replaced by spiritual spaces such as church, prayer sessions, and Scripture reading.

This shift signifies a new way of perceiving one's habitat, with spirituality at its core, of being part of a community where individuals can be themselves and feel a sense of belonging in a congregation of ordinary people with whom one resonates, a connection that helps individuals realize they are not alone and feeling comfortable enough to be oneself emphasizes the supportive and accepting nature of the community.

In another context, the term "safe space" alluded to by a participant implies a transformation in the social environment, where individuals can open up, be vulnerable, and connect with others ready to provide prayer and counsel. Such a shift in the social habitat fosters building a network of trusted friends, mentors, or church members who facilitate emotional healing and growth. It represents a reconfiguration of one's social

surroundings to prioritize support and a sense of community, another fundamental aspect of reframing one's habitat.

The reframed habitat suggests a transformation in how people relate to and interact with their environment and community, for example, the idea that within the community, older and younger generations are treated equally and engage in meaningful conversations and interactions. This phenomenon reflects a sense of unity and inclusivity among different age groups, reshaping the habitat to create an environment where people of all generations can coexist harmoniously.

In sum, instead of defining one's milieu through worldly pursuits, these interviewees got to see their habitat primarily as a space for spiritual development and connection. This evolution is a testament to the power of spirituality in reshaping not only their inner selves but also their external surroundings. It reflects the deep integration of spirituality into their daily lives, allowing them to find solace, meaning, and a sense of belonging in their spiritual community.

The research of MacKinlay and Trevitt (2010) revealed that although for older adults, the specter of age-related losses looms large, casting shadows of despair that may seem unconquerable as they find themselves confronted with a series of challenging trials and hardships, a profound and enlightening path lies along the realm of spiritual reminiscence. These findings shed light on the remarkable resilience and positivity that can emerge from the depths of adversity. As mentioned, the participants in the study faced an array of dire hardships that punctuated the tumultuous landscape of their lives.

Nevertheless, despite this turbulent journey, a majority expressed a profound sense of spirituality and meaning in life (Horning et al., 2011).

The phenomenon of resilience and positivity emerging from the depths of adversity is not isolated but resonates with other studies exploring the connection between spirituality and aging. Faigin and Pargament (2011), Moschella (2011), and Snodgrass and Sorajjakool (2011) all echoed the sentiment that older adults who constructively review and reappraise their losses and difficulties through the lens of spirituality tend to find an enriched sense of meaning and purpose in their later years. Such an approach enables individuals to transform their struggles into opportunities for personal growth, deepening their connection to inner values.

It is worth noting that in the context of these studies, spirituality extends beyond traditional religious beliefs and rituals. It is a quest for meaning, purpose, and personal growth, encompassing a wide spectrum of experiences and beliefs. In a broader sense, spirituality acts as a search for alignment with one's core values, a journey of self-discovery that goes beyond the boundaries of organized religion described in the third central theme of this study, connecting with inner values. This notion of connecting with inner values and discovering one's unique purpose in life encapsulates the profound self-exploration individuals embark upon as they delve into their core values and let their inner compass provide a guiding light, illuminating the path toward making meaningful choices and decisions that align with their deeply held beliefs.

One interviewee described a transformation in her behavior driven by her spiritual path and inner knowing as experiencing a shift away from telling white lies and taking a

more truthful approach in their communication. This transformation in personal ethics is a clear reflection of how they are connected with their inner values. The behavior change, which includes avoiding untruths and being more honest, is a testament to their deepening alignment with their inner moral compass and spiritual beliefs.

Another participant described a moment when faced with a commitment to deliver a sermon, and a sense of duty or responsibility takes over despite experiencing personal doubts or fears. His commitment to fulfilling his promise reflects his connection with inner values, particularly his moral and ethical values.

In yet another context, belief in the essential creative power within the universe and in every human being is seen as the core of one's faith, informing all of one's actions and decisions. Here, the connection with inner values stems from one's deep faith in the creative and transformative potential of individuals and the universe as one entity, underscoring that the individual's inner values guide their perspective on creation, maintenance, and development. Their faith in creative power influences their approach to life, actions, and decisions, showcasing the profound connection between their inner values and worldviews.

Searching for meaning and purpose leads to the fourth theme of the study, finding meaning and purpose. It explores the timeless quest for direction and fulfillment in life. This quest is not limited to any specific age group but an ongoing journey of self-discovery. Through introspection, reflection, and action, individuals seek to unearth their unique purpose and cultivate a deeper understanding of what truly gives their life meaning.

Finally, there were those in the study who, In the face of adversity, sought refuge in something greater than themselves, whether it be a higher power, a shared belief system, or the broader universe, as though a call to action that encourages individuals to live in accordance with their inner values, harnessing them as a beacon that guides their path toward a more purposeful and meaningful existence. However, for another participant, the pursuit of meaning and purpose is through deepening their personal relationship with God through prayer, study, and reflection. This spiritual connection and self-reflection are instrumental in their quest for meaning and purpose.

Mindfulness and acceptance, the fifth theme in this study, centers on practicing mindfulness and embracing the present moment and underscores the significance of cultivating mindfulness as a tool for self-awareness, stress reduction, and personal growth through accepting oneself and the circumstances of life and by doing so, lay the foundation for greater well-being and contentment. Speaking of the spiritual lessons he learned, one interviewee alluded to the idea that hidden or secret aspects of life will eventually be revealed and brought to light. This concept of revealing secrets and bringing them into the open aligns with the aspiration of seeking truth and transparency. It underscores the importance of being mindful of our actions, thoughts, and secrets and accepting the consequences of revealing them. Acknowledging that hidden truths will eventually come to light encourages individuals to be more aware of their choices and actions, fostering a sense of mindfulness in their behavior. Embracing this mindfulness and accepting the truth can lead to personal growth and a more authentic living.

Another lesson cited by a participant relates to personal responsibility and agency, emphasizing that the individual is responsible for their responses and actions in the face of external events rather than placing blame on external factors, acknowledging one's own agency, and taking responsibility for one's actions and responses underscores the concept that, even when faced with circumstances beyond one's control, one can choose how to respond, and those responses have a profound impact on the unfolding of events in one's life and reinforces the idea that mindfulness involves recognizing and taking ownership of one's actions and choices.

Some participants also spoke of how being mindful of the need for forgiveness and acceptance can lead to personal growth and a sense of inner peace. By forgiving others and oneself, one experiences healing, restoration, and reconciliation due to the profound impact of forgiveness on one's spiritual and emotional well-being and its role in achieving spiritual growth and personal liberation.

In a culture dominated by the relentless pursuit of material wealth and possessions, the last theme, transcending materialism, challenges prevailing norms and encourages individuals to explore a deeper dimension of life. One interviewee declared that she did not believe in her guardian angel but in her sense of being guided and receiving inspiration from sources beyond the material world, such as dreams and intuitive experiences, suggesting an exploration of spiritual guidance and the concept of synchronicity. This approach implies how this individual perceives guidance and meaningful connections in her life that cannot be solely attributed to material or rational

explanations. It highlights the idea that there is a deeper, spiritual dimension to her experiences, whether through dreams, inspiration, or unexpected encounters.

In another context, a participant, due to an encounter with a numerologist, opened her mind to the idea that there is more to reality than just the physical, a key element of transcending materialism. As a result of the numerologist's ability to give accurate readings about people in her past, she became open to exploring the metaphysical to understand a more profound reality beyond the surface of everyday life.

Transcending materialism can also happen through the pursuit of spiritual growth and a more profound connection with the divine. As one participant put it, we should all be like God. However, as he remarked, it is seen as a profound and challenging aspiration that requires a spiritual transformation and the emulation of divine qualities.

In summary, the themes of mindfulness and acceptance and transcending materialism converge in the pursuit of a more meaningful and purpose-driven life. By embracing mindfulness, accepting the present moment, and transcending the materialistic mindset, individuals can embark on a transformative journey toward spiritual growth, inner peace, and a deeper connection with the world around them. In doing so, these older adults may discover the profound benefits of a life enriched by non-material aspects, where the quest for meaning and purpose takes precedence over the relentless chase for material possessions.

In understanding the interwoven fabric of these six themes—reframing self-identity, reframing one's habitat, connecting with inner values, finding meaning and purpose, mindfulness and acceptance, and transcending materialism—we unravel a

tapestry of profound human experiences and responses. While unique in their focus, these themes collectively form a holistic framework for navigating life's complexities and transitions.

The journey of self-rediscovery and adaptation begins with Reframing Self-Identity, where individuals acknowledge the dynamic nature of their essence, embracing growth and change. This understanding echoes throughout the other themes: Reframing One's Habitat is not merely about physical spaces but also the mental and emotional environments we cultivate, shaping our experiences and perceptions.

Connecting with Inner Values aligns individuals with their core principles, serving as a compass in life's myriad choices. It intertwines seamlessly with Finding Meaning and Purpose, steering individuals toward a fulfilling existence anchored in personal significance and contribution.

Mindfulness and Acceptance serve as guiding practices, fostering resilience, serenity, and a deeper understanding of the self and the world. This foundation enables individuals to navigate life's complexities with grace and clarity.

Transcending Materialism, the culmination of this journey, encapsulates a shift beyond superficial and materialistic pursuits, fostering a deeper connection to the intangible, such as relationships, personal growth, and spirituality.

When these themes are interwoven, they cultivate a tapestry of resilience, fortitude, and wisdom. Individuals find themselves better equipped to confront life's adversities, whether the challenges of aging or other inevitable trials. This integrative approach encourages the construction of lives filled with purpose, the transformation of

circumstances, and the transcendence of limitations. It echoes the sentiment that the internal landscape can be a sanctuary of strength and peace regardless of external circumstances.

In essence, the amalgamation of these themes is not just a theoretical construct; it is a roadmap for living—a guide for individuals to sculpt a life resonant with authenticity, depth, and a profound sense of well-being. It is a reminder that amidst life's constant ebb and flow, the journey toward self-discovery and fulfillment is perennial, ripe with opportunities for growth and transformation.

Theoretical Framework

The study's foundation rested on a blend of philosophical viewpoints and theories. The constructivist philosophy, as elucidated by Kjaersgaard (2005) and Patton (2002), served as the primary pillar to guide the research. Constructivism, emphasizing the active construction of knowledge rather than passive absorption, suggests that individuals shape their understanding through experiences and reflection. This perspective underscores the power of conscious thought, words, and actions in influencing one's well-being and circumstances. The participants in the study actively applied these constructivist practices, steering their thoughts and words to mold their experiences and overcome challenges.

Additionally, the conceptual framework drew from Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991, 2000, 2003) and Tornstam's gerotranscendence theory (1997, 2000, 2005), centering on perspective shifts. Transformative learning involves critically examining long-held beliefs and adapting or replacing them when they no longer serve.

Interestingly, the study found evidence of transformative learning in participants challenging their religious beliefs from childhood, eventually embracing The Christian Community after finding former beliefs incongruent with personal truths. Tornstam's gerotranscendence theory, focusing on continued personal development and evolving perspectives in later life, was evident in how participants redefined their identities, shifted social connections, and embraced life's mysteries and transitions, aligning with the theory's premise.

Overall, the study's framework highlighted the influence of constructivist spirituality and evolving perspectives on the participants' experiences. It echoed previous research indicating that spirituality aids adults in navigating the challenges of aging, fostering optimism and resilience. The principles upheld by The Christian Community seemed to encourage the active construction of life, fostering transformation and resilience in the face of aging's trials.

Limitations of the Study

The execution of the study encountered several limitations that impacted the trustworthiness of the findings. These limitations are inherent in the procedural steps of transcendental phenomenology and involve aspects related to time, researcher effort, participant selection, and the data collection method:

- **Phenomenological method and generalizability:** A fundamental limitation arises from the phenomenological method itself. The focus on a small group of participants and the emphasis on in-depth exploration limit the generalizability of the study's results to the larger population of older adults.

By its nature, phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of experiences for a specific group rather than providing generalizable insights applicable to a broader demographic.

- **Sampling bias and lack of diversity:** The use of snowball sampling, while effective for reaching hard-to-reach populations, introduced a limitation related to participant selection. Participants tended to refer to individuals similar to themselves, leading to a potential sampling bias and compromising the diversity of the study sample. This limitation raises concerns about the representativeness of the findings, particularly when attempting to generalize the results to a larger population of older adults.
- **Limitation in participant interaction:** The method of conducting interviews solely via telephone presented a significant limitation. The absence of physical presence during interviews deprived the researcher of natural nonverbal cues crucial for two-way communication. This limitation may have hindered the depth of understanding and connection between the researcher and participants, potentially affecting the richness of the data collected.
- **Researcher effort and repetitive processes:** The procedural steps, particularly the repetition of the Epoche process before each interview and the multiple iterations of data processing in different ways demanded considerable effort from the researcher. This increased the risk of fatigue or potential bias in interpretation. The subjective nature of the phenomenological analysis,

coupled with the extensive effort required, introduces an element of subjectivity that may impact the trustworthiness of the study's results.

- Time-intensive procedural steps: The transcendental phenomenology approach employed in the study introduced a limitation due to its time-intensive procedural requirements. The need for meticulous completion of steps, including pre-interview questionnaires and member checking, added a substantial time burden. This extended timeline could have affected the reliability of the study, as the prolonged duration might have introduced variations in external factors that could influence participant responses.

Acknowledging and addressing these limitations in future research endeavors will contribute to enhancing the overall robustness and reliability of the research outcomes.

Recommendations for Further Research

Identified limitations in the execution of the study point towards specific areas that could be addressed in future research to enhance the trustworthiness of findings. Here are recommendations grounded in these limitations: (1) Diversify Data Collection Methods. Given the limitation of conducting all interviews via telephone, future research should explore diverse methods of data collection. Incorporating face-to-face interviews or virtual interactions with video capabilities would allow researchers to capture essential nonverbal cues and foster a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. This approach may contribute to richer and more nuanced data, improving the overall quality of the study. (2) Explore Mixed-Methods Approaches. Future research could employ a mixed-methods approach to address the limitation of relying solely on

qualitative methods. Integrating quantitative measures alongside qualitative exploration would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. This approach could involve incorporating standardized scales or objective assessments to complement the in-depth qualitative insights, offering a more robust and well-rounded analysis. (3) Optimize Sampling Strategies. Given the sampling bias introduced by the snowball sampling technique, future studies should consider alternative sampling strategies to enhance diversity and reduce potential biases. Random or stratified sampling methods could be explored to ensure a more representative and varied participant pool. This would contribute to increased external validity and allow for more confident generalizability of findings to the larger population of older adults. (4) Implement Longitudinal Design. Future research could adopt a longitudinal design to address the time-intensive procedural steps and potential variations over time. Following participants over an extended period would allow for a more dynamic exploration of the phenomena, capturing changes and developments in spirituality and aging. This approach could mitigate the impact of external factors that might influence participant responses and contribute to a more robust understanding of the subject matter. (5) Enhance Member Checking Procedures. Future research could implement more rigorous and transparent procedures to strengthen the member-checking process and ensure the accuracy of study findings. Providing participants with detailed summaries of their interviews, allowing them to verify and confirm the accuracy of transcriptions, and actively involving them in the interpretation process can enhance the trustworthiness of the study's outcomes. (6) Utilize Innovative Technologies. Considering the limitation related to the absence of

physical presence during interviews, researchers could explore innovative technologies to bridge the gap. Virtual reality or augmented reality platforms might offer opportunities for more immersive interactions, enabling researchers to capture nonverbal cues and enhance the depth of participant engagement. (7) Validate Findings Through Replication. Given the nature of phenomenological research, where findings are context-specific, future studies should aim to replicate the research in different contexts and with diverse populations. This approach would contribute to the study's external validity and validate the robustness of the identified themes and patterns across varied settings and demographic groups.

In summary, addressing the limitations encountered in the current study requires a multifaceted approach. By incorporating diverse data collection methods, embracing mixed-methods approaches, optimizing sampling strategies, implementing longitudinal designs, enhancing member checking procedures, leveraging innovative technologies, and validating findings through replication, future research can build upon the existing study's limitations and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of spirituality and aging.

Implications

The results of the current study offer ideas about how spirituality can impact positive social change at many levels, with the potential to catalyze positive social change at multiple levels by addressing the understudied aspect of spirituality in relatively healthy and independent baby boomers. The methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications provide a foundation for future research. At the same time, the practice

recommendations offer tangible ways to integrate the study's findings into real-world applications, ultimately contributing to aging populations' well-being and quality of life.

Positive Social Change Impact

The study, focusing on the spirituality of relatively healthy and independent baby boomers, can have profound implications at the Individual Level. By understanding and harnessing the spiritual dimension of their lives, these individuals may experience improvements in subjective well-being, mental health, and overall life satisfaction. The findings could empower them to embrace spiritual practices as a means of self-care, potentially leading to enhanced resilience, coping mechanisms, and a sense of purpose in their later years.

At the Family Level, the positive social change extends to the family level, as the study's insights may influence family dynamics and relationships. If spirituality is found to be a significant factor in the well-being of older adults, families may incorporate spiritual practices into their caregiving strategies. This integration could foster stronger family bonds, open channels for intergenerational communication, and contribute to a supportive environment for aging family members.

At the Public Service Level, healthcare, social services, and community support organizations could benefit from the study's outcomes. Understanding the role of spirituality in the lives of baby boomers may lead to the development of tailored programs and interventions. These initiatives could encompass spiritual well-being components, offering holistic support to individuals navigating the challenges of aging.

This, in turn, might contribute to increased satisfaction and engagement among older adults utilizing these services.

At the Societal/policy Level, the study's potential impact on societal and policy levels is substantial, particularly considering the demographic shifts and challenges associated with an aging population. If the findings demonstrate a positive association between spirituality, health behaviors, and well-being, policymakers may consider integrating spiritual components into public health and wellness initiatives. This could lead to policy changes that recognize the importance of spirituality in promoting healthy aging and allocating resources accordingly. Additionally, advocating for inclusivity in wellness programs that consider diverse spiritual beliefs could contribute to a more equitable approach to aging in society.

Methodological Implications

The study's emphasis on the spirituality of relatively healthy and independent baby boomers introduces a novel perspective into aging research. Methodologically, the study could inspire future researchers to employ mixed-methods approaches, combining qualitative exploration with quantitative measures. Integrating diverse data collection methods, such as in-person interviews alongside traditional telephone interviews, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, exploring innovative data collection technologies might enhance the research's depth and richness.

Theoretical Implications

The study's focus on spirituality within a demographic often overlooked in aging research has theoretical implications. It encourages expanding existing theories on successful aging to include spiritual dimensions. The theoretical framework could evolve to incorporate spirituality as a crucial element influencing overall well-being in the aging process. This shift in perspective could contribute to a more holistic understanding of aging theories, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of human experiences in later life.

Empirical Implications

The study's contribution to filling the gap in the literature suggests empirical implications for future research. Replicating the study with larger and more diverse samples could strengthen the evidence base and increase the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies may be beneficial to explore the dynamic nature of spirituality in aging, capturing changes over time and identifying factors that influence these changes. Additionally, exploring the relationship between spirituality, health behaviors, and psychological well-being across various educational backgrounds could further refine our understanding of these intricate connections.

Practice Recommendations

Integrating Spirituality into Wellness Programs. Based on the potential positive association between spirituality and well-being, practitioners, including healthcare providers and wellness program coordinators, should consider incorporating spiritual components into existing programs. This could involve offering spiritual practices and mindfulness resources or facilitating access to spiritual communities for older adults.

Educating Caregivers and Healthcare Professionals. There is a need to educate caregivers and healthcare professionals on the potential impact of spirituality on the well-being of older adults. Training programs can emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive and inclusive care that acknowledges and respects diverse spiritual beliefs. This education could foster a more compassionate and holistic approach to aging care.

Advocacy for Inclusive Policies. Advocacy efforts should focus on promoting policies that recognize and support the spiritual needs of older adults. This includes advocating for inclusivity in wellness programs, ensuring accessibility to spiritual resources, and encouraging policies that consider diverse spiritual backgrounds in healthcare settings.

Development of Spiritual Assessment Tools. Practitioners could benefit from the development and utilization of comprehensive spiritual assessment tools. These tools could aid in identifying the specific spiritual needs and preferences of older adults, allowing for tailored interventions and support that align with their individual beliefs and practices.

Community Engagement and Social Support. Community organizations and social support networks should recognize the potential role of spirituality in enhancing the quality of life for older adults. Initiatives that foster community engagement, spiritual discussion groups, or intergenerational activities centered around shared spiritual values could contribute to a sense of belonging and purpose among aging individuals.

Conclusions

This study pioneers a profound exploration into the spirituality of relatively healthy and independent baby boomers, a demographic often overlooked in aging research. Bridging a critical gap in the literature sheds light on spirituality's potential positive impact on their well-being. The findings hold transformative implications for individuals, families, organizations, and societal policies, emphasizing the need to recognize and integrate spirituality into the fabric of aging. As we navigate the challenges of an aging population, understanding and embracing the spiritual dimension emerges as a powerful catalyst for fostering resilience, enhancing holistic well-being, and ushering in positive social change that reverberates across generations.

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Appendix A: Screening Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in the study of members of “The Christian Community” and their lived spiritual experience! Please answer the following questions and return this to me by email. After I receive your answers, I will call you to discuss your participation in this study and schedule an interview. If you have any questions, feel free to send them to me at the same email address.

Your name: _____

Your phone number: _____

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Do you have any physical conditions that restrict your mobility? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you have any physical conditions that restrict your mobility? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you willing to openly discuss your experience with spirituality? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you willing to openly discuss your spiritual beliefs and practices? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Do you have any objection to such discussions being tape recorded? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Basic demographic information:

└ What is your birth date?

└ What is your marital status?

└ What is your major source of income?

└ How do you identify your race?

└ What's your Christian denomination?

└ How long have you been affiliated with the Christian Community?

_____ Community Church? _____

└ Other spiritual influences outside of the Christian

Thank you for your time! Please return this questionnaire as an email attachment and let me know what day/times are best to contact you by phone in the next 5 days.

Eddie Soffer

Appendix B: In-Depth Interview Protocol

1. What is your spiritual journey like, and how has it evolved over the years?
2. How does your faith impact your daily life and decision-making processes?
3. In what ways have you observed changes in the Christian community during your lifetime?
4. How do you maintain a strong connection to your spiritual beliefs in your later years?
5. As an older adult in the Christian community, how do you find purpose and meaning in your life?
6. What significant experiences or moments have you had that strengthened your faith throughout the years?
7. In your opinion, how does the faith community support older adults in their spiritual journey?
8. What advice would you offer younger generations seeking to deepen their spirituality in the Christian faith?
9. How do you deal with challenges or difficulties in your faith journey as an older adult?
10. What are the most important life lessons you've learned as you've aged?

Appendix C: Haight's (1988) Life Review Questions

- On the whole, what kind of life do you think you have had?
- If everything were to be the same, would you like to live your life over again?
- If you were going to live your life over again, what would you change? Leave unchanged?
- Discuss your overall feelings and ideas about your life. What would you say have been the three main satisfactions in your life? Why were they satisfying?
- Everyone has had disappointments. What have been the main disappointments in your life?
- What was the hardest thing you had to face in your life? Please describe it.
- What was the happiest period of your life? What about it made it the happiest period? Why is your life less happy now?
- Which was the unhappiest period of your life? Why is your life happier now?
- What was the proudest moment in your life?
- If you could stay the same age all your life, what age would you choose? Why?
- How do you think you have made out in life—better or worse than what you hoped for?
- Talk a little about you as you are now. What are the best things about the age you are now?
- What are the worst things about being the age you are now?
- What are the most important things to you in your life today?
- What do you hope will happen to you as you grow older?
- What do you fear will happen to you as you grow older?

Appendix D: Hodge's (2005) Spiritual Life Map (abbreviated)

Spiritual Assets	Exploratory Questions
Relationship with God	Think of a past major problem you have faced in the past. How did your relationship with God help you to address that problem? What did God teach you about that situation? Have you been able to apply those lessons in other situations? How has God supported you in times of crises? What are the spiritual strengths of your relationship with God? How does God view you/feel about you?
Spiritual Beliefs	What does your faith teach about trials? Is there a metaphysical reason for life's challenges? What are your favorite scriptures? Are there certain scriptures that really speak to you during times of stress? What spiritual principles have you learned from life's experiences?
Spiritual Rituals	Are there certain rituals or regular spiritual practices that help you cope with life's trials? Are some rituals particularly effective in certain situations? Are there particular rituals that strengthen your relationship with God?
Church-Based Social Support	What role has your church or faith community played during a crisis? Are there relationships in your church that are particularly supportive? Has there been a spiritual mentor in your life that has been particularly significant? How have these individuals assisted you in coping with trials?