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THE EFFECTS OF LIFE REVIEW ON  
WELL-BEING IN THE ELDERLY

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Psychology:  
Life-Span Developmental Psychology

---

by  
Karen Michelle Fagerstrom

June 2002

THE EFFECTS OF LIFE REVIEW ON  
WELL-BEING IN THE ELDERLY

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by  
Karen Michelle Fagerstrom  
June 2002

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## ABSTRACT

The effects of participation in a Guided Autobiography Group versus a Walking Group on elderly participants' psychological well being were studied. Well-being was assessed before and after a 5-week period among Guided Autobiography Group and Walking Group participants in Setting I, and before and after a 10-week period for Guided Autobiography Group participants in Setting II. Ryff's Psychological Well Being Scale, which measures six components of well being: levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance was used in a pretest-posttest design. The results indicated that after a 5-week period, participants in the Guided Autobiography Group experienced significant increases in personal growth and positive relations with others, while no increases were noted among participants in the Walking Group. After a 10-week period, participants in the Guided Autobiography Group experienced increases in personal growth. These findings support the claim in the literature that

Autobiography Groups that provide opportunities for facilitated life review are beneficial for the elderly.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

It is widely believed among developmental psychologists that old age is a distinct developmental stage with unique goals, struggles and opportunities for growth. The primary struggle in old age, as laid out by Erikson, is the struggle between integrity and despair (Erikson, 1950). According to Erikson, those who find a greater degree of integrity than despair may go on to achieve wisdom, and thus successfully negotiate the final stage of life (Erikson, 1950). Achieving integrity involves making sense of disparate aspects of one's life and seeing the life as one complete whole, rather than bits and pieces of a puzzle strewn about (Erikson, 1950). Integrity is achieved when each part of the puzzle is put into place, forming one complete picture, and the individual feels a sense of ownership and acceptance of the entire picture. Accordingly, the struggle between integrity and despair necessitates a willingness of the individual to recall their past and

engage in actively reviewing their life (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986).

Butler (1963) claimed that people achieve integrity through what he named the life review process; this is the process of looking back and analyzing one's past, the end result hopefully being achievement of integrity. Butler suggested that the life review is a "naturally occurring, universal mental process" that occurs as people age (Butler, 1963, p.65). During the life review process, past experiences resurface and are then analyzed, reinterpreted and reintegrated to form one complete life story (Butler, 1963).

"As the past marches in review, it is surveyed, observed, and reflected upon by the ego. Reconsideration of previous experiences and their meanings occurs, often with concomitant revised or expanded understanding. Such reorganization of past experience may provide a more valid picture, giving new and significant meaning to one's life" (Butler, 1963, p.68). Seeing one's life through a different lens that gives events new meaning is

reinterpretation. Reinterpretation leads to reintegration as events are then replaced into one's personal understanding of themselves. It is during the "process of reintegration and recasting whereby events and circumstances that were once experienced as painful have over the years taken on new meanings as part of the whole life cycle...traumatic events have been put into perspective. Ultimate integration comprises all of those conscious and unconscious processes by which the individual at the end of life seeks to reexperience and to bring again into scale each of the psychosocial themes that in turn have given shape to the life cycle" (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986, p.71).

The review process most often leads to fulfillment; but depression or despair sometimes occur, particularly for those who are unable to achieve integration, often because they harbor great regrets, guilt, or unattained dreams (Butler, 1963; Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick, 1986). Integration involves accepting all aspects of one's life as part of one unified self (Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick,

1986). People integrate their past by reinterpreting events, thereby altering their personal understanding of their life. Successful reorganization leads to increased self-awareness, fulfillment and integration (Butler, 1963). Butler saw the life review as a natural and healthy process occurring without effort in the majority of people as they age. Successful reintegration can facilitate positive functioning in the elderly and can lead to increased self-awareness, fulfillment and integration (Butler, 1963; Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick, 1986; Birren, & Deutchman 1991).

Since Butler introduced the concept of life review to the literature in 1963, research on the subject has grown exponentially (Fry, 1991). Growing along with this body of research are numerous methods and programs designed to help the elderly achieve integration through some form of life review. Reminiscence is the most basic of these methods, involving only simple remembering of the past with no effort made towards integration or analysis. In Fry's (1991) study, 85% of the elderly participants reported reminiscing "sometimes" or a "great deal"; the

majority of these reminiscers enjoyed remembering the past. However, a common criticism of reminiscence therapy is that it brings up old and sometimes painful memories but does not allow for analysis or discussion of these life events, which may leave the person confused and depressed (Haight, 1991). The Life Review is similar to reminiscence in that it involves remembering one's past, but the life review adds the dimension of analysis to the reminiscence. In the life review, people not only remember their past, but also work to understand their life and to integrate their past into a complete whole (Davies & McConnell, 2001).

#### Approaches to Life Review

There are many variations of the life review procedure; researchers formulate a variety of questions with differing goals, which are sometimes discussed in group settings, sometimes discussed one on one, and sometimes answered alone (Haight, 1991). Guided Autobiography is a form of life review that uses sensitizing questions constructed specifically to aid people in understanding and accepting their past

on the path to achieving integration; participants answer the questions alone, and then discuss their answers in a group setting (Birren & Deutchman, 1991). When the life review is conducted in a group setting, it has the added effect of facilitating new friendships, thereby broadening social support networks (Dietche, 1979), which are declining for the majority of elderly persons today (Antonucci, Fuhrer & Dartigues, 1997; Newsom & Schultz, 1996). The vast majority of studies on all variations of life review have reported positive effects (Fry, 1991).

#### The Place of Life Review Among Retirement Community Activities

Retirement communities typically employ activity directors to plan a variety of activities for their residents. The unstated purpose of these activities is wellness. However, eldercare research suggests that typical activities planned for residents may be nothing more than time fillers that provide a change of scenery for an hour or so (Feier & Leight, 1981). These activities often superficially increase well-being, and the effects are short lived (Okun, Olding,

& Cohn, 1990). In contrast, the life review is a meaning-rich group activity with potentially life altering and long lasting effects (Haight, Michel & Hendrix, 2000).

Dietsche (1979) found that although participants in her life review group previously attended many activities together, it was not until the life review group that the members learned each other's names, and had the opportunity for true conversation. During other types of activities members were so involved in the activities themselves, such as painting or stretching, that they did not talk much with other group members (Dietsche, 1979). The life review group provided participants an opportunity to talk intimately with peers and to begin to form new friendships.

#### Recent Research on Life Review

Since its inception in 1963, the life review has gained increasing attention among gerontologists. Many researchers believe the life review has numerous potential benefits and some have set out to demonstrate these benefits. Unfortunately, until



recently, most researchers did not collaborate and often used differing definitions and techniques in exploring the effects of life review (Haight, 1991; McDonald & Curl, 1997). It is thus difficult to compare findings from past studies because of conceptual and methodological inconsistencies. However, as noted earlier, life review and reminiscence studies generally report positive results (Haight, 1991; Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Haight, Michel & Hendrix, 1998, 2000; Taft & Nehrke, 1995).

Lappe (1987) randomly assigned 83 participants (free from cognitive dysfunction) currently living in nursing homes, either into a life review group or a current events group. Both groups used a free form format with open-ended questions to discuss either the past self (life review group) or current events (current events group); they met twice weekly for 10 weeks. This study used a pretest-posttest design and a self-report measure to assess self-esteem outcomes. Lappe found significant increases in self-esteem for participants in the life review group but not for participants in the current events group.

Tabourne (1995) studied the effects of life review on Alzheimer's disease patients in nursing homes. In this study 32 participants diagnosed with mild Alzheimer's disease were randomly assigned to either a life review group or a control group. The life review group discussed positive and negative memories from childhood to old age and met 2 times a week for 12 weeks. This was a pretest-posttest design and the measurements consisted of nurses' checklist data, activity attendance data, observations made by an observer in the life review, and a self-esteem questionnaire (SEQ-3). The life review participants had significant decreases in disorientation and significant increases in time recognition, person recognition, place recognition, self-worth, acceptance of past, acceptance of present, future orientation, activity attendance and their ability to stay engaged. No differences on any measure were observed in the control group.

Haight (1988) selected 60 participants from the Meals on Wheels Program and randomly assigned them to an individual life review, a friendly visit or a

control group. She used a pretest-posttest design and measured Life Satisfaction (Life Satisfaction Index A, LSIA), Well-Being (Bradburn's Affect Balance Scale, ABS), Depression (Zung's Self Rating Depression Scale, SDS); she also used 15 questions from the Older American's Resources and Services Multidimensional Assessment Form to measure Activities in Daily Living. Participants in the life review treatment met with an experimenter for 1 hour visits 6 times; the experimenter used the Life Review Experiencing Form (LREF) to conduct one-on-one interviews. The LREF is a guide with focusing questions in an organized structure aimed at promoting integration of life events. Some sample topics and questions from the LREF are as follows: Childhood, Did you have any brothers or sisters? Tell me what each was like?; Adolescence, Did you attend church and youth groups?; Adulthood, What was life like for you in your twenties and thirties? 4The participants in the friendly visit category received a friendly visit from an experimenter and the control group received no treatment. Haight (1988) found significant increases

in life satisfaction and well being for participants in the life review group; no other significant effects were found.

Haight, Michel and Hendrix (1998) studied the short and long term effects of life review in 256 non-depressed, newly located nursing home residents. They used a Solomon 4 group design, and randomly assigned people to a life review treatment or a friendly visit treatment. Both treatments were conducted in 1 hour sessions once a week for 6 weeks. The life review treatment was conducted using the LREF in a one-on-one format. In friendly visits, participants and research assistants were free to discuss anything except the past. Well-being was assessed with Bradburn's 1969 Affect Balance Scale (ABS), Life Satisfaction was assessed with the LSIA, Self Esteem was measured with the Self Esteem Scale (SES), Depression was measured with Beck's Depression Inventory, Hopelessness was measured with the Hopelessness Scale (HS), and suicidal thoughts were measured with Beck's Suicide Ideation Scale (SIS). At the end of 8 weeks and at the end of 1 year, decreases in depression,

hopelessness, and well-being were found, as were increases in life satisfaction. Haight, Michel, and Hendrix thus found support for their hypothesis that the life review prevents despair and promotes developmental integrity.

Haight, Michel and Hendrix (2000) expanded upon their 1998 study by continuing assessments 2 and 3 years after the initial life review treatment. Fifty-two of the original 256 participants were included in the 2000 study; these participants were all tested 4 times. Twenty-nine participants were in the experimental group; 23 participants were in the control group. The original research assistants went back to conduct the posttest interviews using the same measures used in their 1998 study. They found decreases in depression, and increases in life satisfaction and self esteem among the life review participants at all post tests: eight weeks, one year, two years, and three years. Their extended study provides support for the notion that the life review can have long lasting benefits.

Botella and Feixas (1995) used Birren's Guided Autobiography Group methods to lead a life review study with a group of elderly people in Spain. The study used a pretest posttest design with a Repertory grid to study the effects of the Guided Autobiography Group. Botella and Feixas (1995) found significant differences in the distance between self/ideal-self and self-ideal/others scores between the pretest and posttest scores of people in the Guided Autobiography Group but not in the control group; this suggests that participants in the guided autobiography group reconstructed their past experiences to produce a positive change (Botella & Feixas, 1995). Botella and Feixas (1995) concluded that substantial reconstructive processes that improve self-esteem could occur with the guided autobiography group.

#### Dimensions of Well Being and the Life Review

Positive psychological functioning has received increasing attention in gerontological research in recent years. For many years, researchers studied psychological pathology, working under the assumption that the absence of psychological dysfunction

indicated positive psychological functioning. This is not necessarily correct; Ryff argues that good health consists of more than the absence of dysfunction (1995). Ryff (1989) identified six key dimensions that together constitute positive mental functioning or well being: self acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy, (1995, 1989). The current study uses these constructs to assess well-being.

#### Personal Growth

Personal growth is an important dimension of well being. Seeing oneself as continuously developing as a person, improving over time, taking on new challenges and tasks, being open to new experiences and gaining more knowledge about one's self indicate high personal growth, while personal stagnation, lack of self improvement, and the inability to develop new attitudes indicate low personal growth (Ryff, 1989, 1991). The life review process may facilitate personal growth by requiring people to introspect and analyze personally relevant aspects of their past, forming new views of their personal history (Birren & Deutchman, 1991). Life review research suggests that people find new meaning in their life as they

participate in the process (Birren & Deutchman, 1991), possibly because during the life review people can settle past quarrels, reinterpret past behaviors and in doing this achieve integration (Butler & Lewis, 1982).

### Self Acceptance

Self acceptance involves acceptance of both the current self and the past self (Ryff, 1989, 1995, 1991; Ryff & Keyes, 1995); achieving self acceptance is indicative of achieving integration. During the process of life review it is possible to gain deep insight into the self, both past and present. In writing and sharing one's personal history, people may gain a stronger sense of identity (Birren & Deutchman, 1991). The life review facilitates introspection into aspects of one's past and current life by allowing one to analyze, reintegrate and more fully accept one's personal history (Kaminsky, 1978). Butler and Lewis (1982) found participants in the life review experienced feelings of having done one's best, a sense of pride in accomplishments and an acceptance of their mortal life. Life review may lead to increased self acceptance in the elderly through reanalyzing the reasons behind one's prior actions (Dietsche, 1979; Butler & Lewis, 1982).



### Purpose in Life

Purpose in Life involves feeling that one's life has a purpose and meaning (Ryff, 1998). The act of analyzing one's past, through the life review process, to more deeply understand one's life is in itself a reason to be alive. The life review can provide people with a sense of directedness, giving people intentions, goals and focus (Butler & Lewis, 1982). The life review may enable participants to develop deeper meaning in their past while setting goals for the future: "As people create maps of their past they also develop maps of their future" (Birren & Deutchman, 1991, p.8). Birren and Deutchman have found that elders involved in the life review process have a future oriented perspective and feel an enhanced sense of purpose (Birren & Deutchman, 1991).

### Positive Relations with Others

Close, trusting, caring and satisfying personal relationships with others indicate positive relations with others (Ryff, 1991). Old age is often accompanied by the loss of loved ones just when elders need them most. The life review facilitates the

formation of close and enduring friendships (Birren & Deutchman, 1991). Being a member of the life review group improves verbal interaction (Baker, 1985), decreases social isolation and increases socialization (Cook, 1984). Sharing intimate details of one's life and listening to the intimate details of others' lives builds warm, trusting relationships. People may realize they have more in common with their neighbors and peers than previously thought, which may facilitate development of long-lasting close friendships. Group life review therapy increases interaction and communication between group members (Baker, 1985). Tabourne (1995) found that life review increased positive social interaction.

#### Environmental Mastery

Environmental mastery is defined as actively managing aspects of one's life to best suit one's preferences and needs (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It includes feeling in control of one's life and taking advantage of environmental opportunities (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Participation in a life review group helps people realize how they have actively shaped

their environments in the past; and this realization may enable them to see and exercise the power they still have to control their lives (Birren & Deutchman, 1991). Life review increases social utilization; participants may attend other classes in the community or better utilize their environment in other ways (Ingersoll & Goodman, 1980). Berghorn and Schafer (1987) found that persons low in environmental mastery prior to joining a life review group gained the most in this area.

#### Autonomy

Autonomy is defined as evaluating oneself by one's own personal standards and exhibiting self-regulation and self-determination (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). During deep introspection people may develop increased confidence in their ability to make satisfactory life choices after realizing they have made satisfactory life choices for many years (Birren, 1991). Part of the life review process involves evaluating oneself by one's own standards; people who enter the life review carrying "external" standards

may become more "internal" while engaged in the life review (Birren & Deutchman, 1991).

#### Rationale for the Current Study

Research conducted on reminiscence and life review has established a base of research, highlighting its positive impacts on those who participate (Haight, 1991). Many professionals in gerontology settings are convinced of the efficacy of life review; however, research to date has often used descriptive measures and differing life review techniques. The nursing profession has studied life review and reminiscence therapy for many years, with generally positive but some mixed findings (McDonald & Curl, 1997). One reason for the mixed findings is the inconsistency of definitions of life review and reminiscence (McDonald & Curl, 1997), and the inconsistency of the life review strategies. Each researcher generally uses their own life review technique; the techniques vary in topics discussed, longevity of groups, amount of guidance, and levels of analysis. Moreover, often the details of their techniques are not outlined so replication or additional research is impossible.

In contemporary Psychology an increased attention to aging has revived interest in life review processes. James Birren is a pioneer in this field and has written a book with Deutchman detailing a structured method of conducting the life review using autobiographical groups (Birren & Deutchman, 1991). Their structured format can be used by researchers and practitioners generally, and thus allows for replication.

Work on aging in psychology has shifted some of it's focus to adaptive aging. Consistent with this, there has been continued research on life review, now using well-established measures of successful aging. One such measure is Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, a global measure assessing psychological wellness. As noted, the measure assesses six distinct dimensions of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self acceptance (Ryff, 1997). This measure is particularly useful, as it allows us to assess the impact of life review on each well-being dimension separately. Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) has been rigorously tested; the PWB has demonstrated consistent reliability and validity, and has proved to be conceptually superior

to single factor well-being measures (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). Using Birren's life review methodology and Ryff's well-being measure ensures potential replications and/or extensions to this study, in research and in practice.

We hypothesize that attending a group life review course (as opposed to attending a group walking club) will have a significant effect on elderly retirement community dwellers' well being. Specifically, we hypothesize that attending a group life review course will significantly increase the participant's levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance.

We tested this hypothesis in two different settings. We tested it with participants in a 10-week and in a 5-week guided autobiography group. In the first setting (Setting I) we used Birren and Deutchman's full-length format, which consisted of classes that met for 2.5 hours a week for a period of 10 weeks. This class was offered as a University of California Los Angeles Extension course. No control group was used in Setting I, though participants served as their own control (for some potential confounding variables in regard to subject

characteristics) because we used a pretest/posttest design.

We tested our hypothesis once more (Setting II) with additional participants. To attract more elderly participants we chose to run the study on site at a retirement community and at a senior center, thus making the classes more accessible to our target population. We also shortened the class length in Setting II in hopes of increasing the class's appeal. The Guided Autobiography group in Setting II met for 1 hour a week for a period of 5 weeks. In Setting II a walking group was used as the control group.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHOD

#### Design

A pretest posttest design was used for this study. There were two treatment groups; each of these groups was a guided autobiography group that met once weekly for a period of 10 (Setting I) or 5 (Setting II) weeks (see procedures section for a detailed description of these guided autobiography groups). Setting II also had a control group, which was a walking group that met for 1 hour weekly to walk together. (See procedures section for a detailed description of this walking group). The dependent variables were the six psychological well-being dimensions of Carol Ryff's Psychological Well-being (PWB) Scale: levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance. The six dependent variables were measured by the six PWB subscales (for a more detailed description see Materials and Scoring Section).



## Participants

### Setting I

Participants involved in Setting I (the 10-week guided autobiography group) were 11 seniors enrolled in an Extension Class on Guided Autobiography taught at the University Of California Los Angeles, a major university in Southern California. Eight participants were female and 3 participants were male. Ten of the participants were Caucasian, and 1 was Asian American. Their ages ranged from 51 to 78 with a mean age of 76. These individuals were well educated (mean years of education = 18); 10 reported an annual income of more than 40 thousand dollars, and 1 reported an annual income of 20-30 thousand dollars. Seven of the participants were married, 2 were divorced, and 2 were widowed. Participants reported they engaged in 0-10 activities per week (mean number of activities per week = 3).

### Setting II

Participants involved in Setting II (the 5-week program) were 41 seniors living in a Southern California Retirement Community or active in a

Southern California Senior Center who enrolled in either the guided autobiography group or were active in a group walking club. Twenty-seven of the participants were Caucasian, 8 participants were African American and 6 participants were Asian American. Twenty nine participants were female and twelve were male. Their ages ranged from 65 to 89 with a mean age of 76. These individuals were well educated (mean years of education = 17); 24 reported an annual income of more than 40 thousand dollars, 3 reported an annual income of 30-40 thousand dollars, 8 reported an annual income of 20-30 thousand dollars and 6 reported an annual income of less than 10 thousand dollars. Participants reported they engaged in 1-10 activities per week (mean number of activities per week = 5). Of the 41 participants 18 completed the 5-week autobiography program and 22 completed the walking program. There were no significant differences between the treatment group demographics and the control group demographics.

## Materials and Scoring

An informed consent form describing the study's requirements and purpose (see Appendix C) and a demographic sheet asking questions about the personal characteristics of the participants such as age, education level, annual income, and number of activities engaged in weekly, etc. (see Appendix D) were given on the first day of the study. The Psychological Well-being Scale (PWB) asks participants to circle one number on a scale of 1-6 indicating how strongly they agree or disagree with statements about their own psychological well-being; this scale was used as both the pretest and posttest (see Appendix E).

Group Autobiography classes were conducted using methods outlined in Birren and Deutchman's book "How to Lead Autobiography Groups with Older Adults" (Birren & Deutchman, 1991). This format involves participants answering "sensitizing questions" about specific topics at home, then coming to class and discussing their responses with the group. Upon completion of the study all participants received a

Debriefing Statement briefly describing the purpose of the study and providing participants with information about how to obtain the results of the study or more information (see Appendix H).

Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (PWB) was used to assess well being (1989). The scale contains six sub scales: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance. The 54-item version of Ryff's scale was chosen for this study. Each subscale consisted of 9 items; these items were alternated to form one continuous 54-item scale (see Appendix E). Participants responded to each question on a six point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Reverse-scored items are recoded in the final scoring (1 = 6, 2 = 5, 3 = 4, 4 = 3, 5 = 2, 6 = 1), so that higher scores indicate high self-ratings on the dimension assessed. Sample items from each subscale are included below: Autonomy: "I am not afraid to voice my opinions even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people", Environmental Mastery: "In general, I feel like I am

in charge of the situation I am in", Personal Growth: "I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons" (Reverse Scored), Positive relations with others: "Most people see me as loving and affectionate", Purpose in Life: "I live my life one day at a time and don't really think about the future" (Reverse Scored), Self Acceptance: "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out". Participants' responses to the 54 questions were resorted into the original subscales and then summed. The possible score range for each subscale is 9-54. Internal consistency (alpha) for each subscale is given as follows: autonomy, .83; environmental mastery, .86; personal growth, .85; positive relations with others, .88; purpose in life, .88; self acceptance, .91. Correlation with the 120-item parent scale broken down by sub scales is as follows: autonomy, .97; environmental mastery, .98; personal growth, .97; positive relations with others, .98; purpose in life, .98; self acceptance, .99. All other information on the scale can be found in Ryff

(1989). PWB pretest scores were compared to PWB posttest scores.

The Guided Autobiography  
Course (Setting I)

This was a 10-week course in which the full course format was used. Nine topics were discussed over the period of 10 weeks; each topic had about 10-13 sensitizing questions. The first topic addressed was "The Major Branching Points of Your Life". People were asked to view their life as a tree with turning or branching points; then they were asked to deeply analyze the branching points. Some of the sensitizing questions for this topic are as follows: "About how old were you at the time of the branching point? Did it happen too soon? Who were the important people involved in the turning point? What were the feelings, the emotions you experienced at the time of the turning point?" The second topic addressed was "Your Family". Some of the corresponding sensitizing questions are as follows: "Who held the power in your family? Why? Who made the decisions? How did you know? Who offered support, warmth and nurturance?" The third topic addressed was "Your Major Life Work

and Career". Some of the corresponding sensitizing questions are as follows: "How did you get into your major life work? How did you find it? Did you choose it because your family expected it?" The fourth topic addressed was "The Role of Money in Your Life". Some of the corresponding questions are as follows: "What role did money play in your family? What were you taught about money? Was it scarce or plentiful? Were you poor or well off?" The fifth topic addressed was "Your Health and Body Image". Some of the corresponding questions are as follows: "What health problems have you experienced in your life? How did you feel about each of these? How did you handle these problems?". The sixth topic addressed was "Your Sexual Identity, Sex Roles, and Sexual Experiences". Some of the corresponding questions are as follows: "When did you first realize that you were a boy or a girl? When did you first realize that boys and girls were different? How did you feel about that?" The seventh topic addressed was "Your Experiences with Death or Your Ideas About Death". Some of the corresponding questions are as follows: "How did you

feel about death when you were a child? Did you lose an animal that was like a member of the family? What did you think when your pet died?" The eighth topic addressed was "Your Loves and Hates". Some of the corresponding questions are as follows: "What persons, places or things aroused your greatest feelings of love when you were a child?" "How have your ideas about love changed during your life?". The ninth and final topic discussed was "The Meaning of Your Life and Your Aspirations and Life Goals". Some of the corresponding sensitizing questions are as follows: "What kinds of different goals do you have - material, social, personal, universal, moral, religious - and how important have they been to you? Have your goals always been the same? Were there any religious traditions in your home as a child? Have you carried them out? Why or Why not?" (See Appendix G).

The Guided Autobiography  
Course (Setting II)

For Setting II, because the Guided Autobiography course was condensed from a 10-week to 5-week period, 4 topics were chosen for use during class discussion.



Topics chosen were; 1) major life branching points, 2) family, 3) life work or career, 4) your life's meaning, aspirations and life goals. Questions from the remaining 6 topics were supplied to participants on the last day of class. The actual sets of question for each topic were given in their entirety and were identical to those given during the first four weeks of Setting I.

#### Procedures

At the beginning of the first class session participants were informed about the general nature of the study, and all participants consented to participate. Participants were then given a packet of information to complete at home and return during the following class session. This was done to conserve class time. The packets included an informed consent form (see Appendix C), the PWB (see Appendix E), and a Demographic Sheet (see Appendix D). Then group members spent the rest of the class time introducing themselves and discussing the Guided Autobiography Group format. Guided Autobiography Group facilitators followed the procedures outlined in "How

to Lead Autobiography Groups with Older Adults" to lead the classes (Birren and Deutchman 1991).

Participants prepared writings on certain life themes for each week's class using what Birren and Deutchman call "sensitizing questions". Sensitizing questions focus and guide the life review, guiding people toward a fresh analysis of their life's narratives, for example: "Who held the power in your family? Why? Who made the decisions? How did you know?". At the beginning of each class session the class facilitator read the sensitizing questions aloud to focus participants on the topic. Then participants volunteered to read their prepared writings. While one participant read their prepared response all other group members listened attentively; no questions or comments were permitted during this time. When the participant finished reading their piece, other group members were encouraged to and did ask questions and make comments. If no class member had questions the group leader would ask questions or relate similarities to other group members' stories to facilitate discussion. During the class session

preceding the final class participants were given a final PWB to be completed at home, and returned at the final class session. Upon commencement of the final class session participants were given a debriefing statement detailing the nature of the study (see Debriefing Statement, Appendix G). For more information about the time line and format of this study please see Appendix G.

### Setting I

Participants self selected for this study by enrolling in a Guided Autobiography Group offered as an Extension class at the University of California Los Angeles. To provide a format that encouraged intimate group discussions 2 classes of 5-6 people each were formed and lead in neighboring rooms by the 2 facilitators. Each class followed the procedures outlined above. In Setting I participants met for 2 hours a week for a period of 10 weeks. Each participant prepared 3 page responses to share with the class weekly and 10-15 minutes of class time was devoted solely to each participant.

## Setting II

Letters were sent to 15 Retirement Communities and Senior Activity Centers in Southern California. The Activity Directors of Mt. San Antonio Gardens and the Pasadena Senior Center expressed interest in and were chosen for the study. The same recruitment procedures were used at both facilities: Classes were advertised in newsletters, and with flyers primarily. Interested participants signed up for the autobiography class by contacting the recreation department personnel at Mt. San Antonio Gardens, or the front desk personnel at the Pasadena Senior Center. Nineteen participants signed up for the guided autobiography groups: Ten at Mount San Antonio Gardens and 9 at the Pasadena Senior Center. To provide a format that encouraged intimate group discussions 2 classes of 4-5 people each were formed in each facility.

Each class followed the procedures outlined above. Participants met for 1 hour a week for a period of 5 weeks. Participants prepared 2 page

writings to share at each class session and 5-7 minutes was devoted to each individuals' story.

Participants in the control group were already engaged in walking together once a week at the Pasadena Senior Center. The instructor of the walking group asked walking group members in her Tuesday and Thursday morning classes if they were interested in participating in a study that involved them filling out some surveys at home this week and again in five weeks. Interested walkers took home packets containing an Informed Consent Form, a PWB Survey and a Demographic sheet. They completed the materials at home and returned them to the instructor the following week. After four weeks (same amount of time as the Guided Autobiography Group) the participants were asked to fill out the PWB survey at home and to return it the following week. After turning in the final PWB all participants were debriefed as to the details of the study.

#### Analyses

Student's t-tests for dependent samples were used for within-group pre-post comparisons in Setting I and

II. The dependent variables were the six psychological well-being dimensions proposed by Ryff; that is, levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance as measured by Ryff's Psychological Well-being (PWB) Scale. Student's t-tests for independent samples were used for between-group comparisons (Life Review vs. Walking) to assess the pre-post changes of the PWB scores in Setting II. A significance level of  $p=.05$  was adopted to conclude statistical significance for the results.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

Mean responses were analyzed with the paired t test. The mean responses and standard deviations are reported in Tables 1 (Setting I) and 2 (Setting II) for the six dependent variables; autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance. Higher scores reflect higher levels of development on each dimension of well being measured.

#### Setting I

In Setting I a significant effect of life review on PWB-personal growth  $t(10) = 2.35$ ,  $p < .05$  was found: Participants had higher scores at the end of the course than they did before taking the course (38.00 vs. 35.18). The guided autobiography course did not significantly affect the other five dimensions of well being; that is, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance.

## Setting II

The Guided Autobiography course had a significant effect on PWB-personal growth  $t(17) = 2.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and PWB-positive relations with others  $t(17) = 2.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ); participants had higher scores at the end of the course than before participating in the course (28.61 vs. 27.11 & 28.61 vs. 32.56). The guided autobiography course did not significantly affect the other four dimensions of well being measured that is, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self acceptance for participants in the treatment group. No statistically significant change was seen in any dimension of well being for the control group in Setting II.

The mean responses and standard deviations for changes of well being scores between the guided autobiography group and walking group participants are reported in Table 3. Changes in PWB-positive relations with others scores before and after life review group were significantly different and larger than the changes in the walking group,  $t(38) = 2.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ), (1.72 vs. -1.09). With regards to the pre-



post changes, no other significant differences were found between guided autobiography course participants and the walking group course participants; that is, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and self acceptance.

Table 1. Mean Pre and Post Test Scores on Psychological Well Being for Participants in Setting I, 10 Week Guided Autobiography Group

Well Being Component	Pre Test	Post Test
Autonomy		
<u>M</u>	23.09	24.09
<u>SD</u>	5.92	14.59
Environmental Mastery		
<u>M</u>	37.54	36.54
<u>SD</u>	3.14	3.93
Personal Growth		
<u>M</u>	35.18	38.00
<u>SD</u>	4.81	1.41
Positive Relations With Others		
<u>M</u>	40.73	38.73
<u>SD</u>	5.04	6.94
Purpose in Life		
<u>M</u>	30.91	31.27
<u>SD</u>	2.66	3.55
Self Acceptance		
<u>M</u>	30.00	30.09
<u>SD</u>	4.00	4.37

Table 2. Mean Pre and Post Test Scores on Psychological Well Being for Participants in Setting II, Guided Autobiography Group and Walking Group

	<u>Guided Autobiography</u> <u>Group</u>		<u>Walking</u> <u>Group</u>	
Well Being Component	Pre Test	Post Test	Pre Test	Post Test
Autonomy				
<u>M</u>	34.28	34.11	30.63	31.13
<u>SD</u>	3.43	4.39	7.00	6.57
Environmental Mastery				
<u>M</u>	32.50	33.28	33.91	32.77
<u>SD</u>	3.65	4.11	4.19	5.38
Personal Growth				
<u>M</u>	27.11	28.61	30.28	30.55
<u>SD</u>	3.58	3.53	5.93	5.72
Positive Relations With Others				
<u>M</u>	32.56	34.28	35.91	34.82
<u>SD</u>	4.77	6.03	5.90	6.58
Purpose in Life				
<u>M</u>	28.44	28.44	29.86	30.68
<u>SD</u>	3.94	3.76	3.73	4.04
Self Acceptance				
<u>M</u>	35.72	36.78	36.05	35.63
<u>SD</u>	3.79	2.80	4.40	4.88

Table 3. Changes of Psychological Well Being Scores Before and After Guided Autobiography Group and Walking Group in Setting II

Well Being Component	Guided Autobiography Group	Walking Group
Autonomy		
<u>M</u>	-.17	.50
<u>SE</u>	1.34	1.01
Environmental Mastery		
<u>M</u>	.78	-1.14
<u>SE</u>	.80	.96
Personal Growth		
<u>M</u>	1.50	.32
<u>SE</u>	.65	.51
Positive Relations With Others		
<u>M</u>	1.72	-1.10
<u>SE</u>	.742	.79
Purpose in Life		
<u>M</u>	.00	.82
<u>SE</u>	.67	.56
Self Acceptance		
<u>M</u>	1.06	-.41
<u>SE</u>	.90	.68

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION

The analysis was aimed at understanding what components of well being a group autobiography class impacts. Our findings indicate that the personal growth dimension of well being increased significantly for participants in both the 10 week and the 5 week guided autobiography groups. While personal growth was the only dimension of well being with a significant increase in Setting I, we find this increase remarkable given our very small sample ( $n = 11$ ). The power for this study was extremely low because of the small sample size. The fact that personal growth was significantly increased provides strong reason to pursue this line of research further.

Because there was no control group in Setting I it could be argued that participating in any activity would lead to an increase in feelings of personal growth. Setting II was designed with a control group of another activity to account for this potential problem. Ten weeks is a substantial length of time to commit to participating in a class of any sort. For

this reason, Setting II used an abbreviated version of the Guided Autobiography Group format and met for 1 hour a week for 5 weeks. We were primarily interested in the effects of Guided Autobiography Groups on the elderly, so conducted Setting II in Retirement Communities and Senior Centers in Southern California.

In Setting II our findings indicate that the personal growth dimension of well being and the positive relations with others dimension of well being increased significantly for participants who attended the Guided Autobiography Group. No significant change in any dimension of well being was seen in participants of the walking club.

In Setting II participating in a weekly activity (walking group) was not enough to raise one's levels of psychological well being. However, participating in a Guided Autobiography Group lead to increases in 2 dimensions of well being. Furthermore increases in personal growth were also seen in Setting I. We propose that the guided autobiography groups increase personal growth because during the process of answering the sensitizing questions at home and

discussing responses with peers, people think about their past intensely and in novel ways facilitating personal understanding and growth.

Ryff describes a person who has high personal growth as a person who "has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has a sense of realizing one's potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self knowledge and effectiveness" (1989, p.46). The very nature of reflecting upon one's life and re-interpreting it with others facilitates this type of growth. One man who reminisces reports that "looking at things and thinking about them made me understand them and they became more meaningful to me. One can never forgive but one can at least understand them more freely" (Schindler, 1999, p.173). Re-experiencing one's story through talking about it with peers is "a process that itself is constitutive..." (Schindler, 1999, p.173).

Personal growth is imperative for successful aging. Ryff defines "the fully functioning person as

continually developing" (1989), yet as people age personal development has been shown to decline (Clarke, Marshal, Ryff, & Rosenthal, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Canadian seniors report declines in their sense of environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life and positive relations with others (Clarke, Marshall, Ryff, & Rosenthal, 2000). Older Americans report lower levels of personal growth than middle aged American adults (Ryff, & Keyes, 1995). These documented decreases clearly evidence the need for programs that increase personal growth.

One reason for this decline in personal growth may be that "as seniors age, they experience declines in...opportunities for personal growth" (Clarke et al., 2000, p.) There is a lack of opportunity for continued meaningful growth and development for the current cohort of elderly people (Ryff, & Singer, 1996). The guided autobiography group may fit this need. The guided autobiography group significantly increased elderly participants' personal growth scores, despite the tendency for feelings of personal growth to decline with age. We can empower the aged



by providing them with opportunities for personal growth (Schindler, 1999; Clarke, et al., 2000).

In Setting II there was a statistically significant increase in the positive relations with others dimension of well being for members of the guided autobiography group. Ryff defines a person who scores high on the positive relations with others dimension of well being as a person who "Has warm, satisfying, trusting relations with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; is capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands the give and take of human relationships" (Ryff, 1991, p.288). In the guided autobiography group people share intimate details of their lives in a positive and supportive environment. Participants also listen to the intimate details of other people's lives, empathizing and providing them with support. This exchange is the pinnacle of a trusting relationship. The facilitator of a guided autobiography group does not permit judgementalness and consistently offers support or creates links to peer's stories if participants are not forthcoming. We propose that

this supportive atmosphere expedites friendship formation and increases positive relations with others.

Reminiscing is an activity that most elderly people enjoy: Talking and thinking about ones self and ones past is something that elderly people engage in naturally (Butler, 1963). Therefore this type of class spurs interest that other classes do not. In a pilot study we attempted to run a control group of another type of activity. We advertised classes in art and book clubs but did not have the response to those classes that we did for the guided autobiography group. The response to the autobiographical group was astounding. We advertised a book club and an autobiography group on the closed circuit television at Leisure World, a large retirement community in Southern California. In two weeks time we had 40 people sign up for the autobiography group and 7 people sign up for the book club. Elderly people are very interested in talking about and thinking about their past and autobiography groups capture their interest. Classes of this sort provide an excellent

opportunity for elderly people to engage in activities that interest them, facilitate personal growth and increase their positive interpersonal relationships.

#### Limitations

A limitation of this entire study is the small number of participants. There are general difficulties in drawing samples in Gerontology research, this is compounded when sensitive subjects are being studied. This is also compounded when participants are asked to commit to attend five weeks of classes.

In Setting II, data was pooled from a Retirement Community and a Senior Center to constitute the Guided Autobiography Group. However, data from the control group was collected solely at the Senior Center. Control group data may have been different if collected at both sites.

#### Significance and Implications

The population of America and the world is aging thus increased attention is being put on aging successfully. The practical application of this research is implementing programs that provide the

elderly with opportunities to improve their psychological well-being. Old age is no longer considered a time of stagnation, rather "Old age is a period in which unique developmental work can be accomplished. Life review therapy and life cycle group therapy are effective aids in this education" (Butler, 1989, p.8). "If older persons are seen as having the capacity for continued growth and development than it is incumbent that they be provided with educational resources and the outlets of personal expression that will facilitate self expansion" (Ryff, 1989, p.47). The guided autobiography group significantly increased personal growth and positive relations with others in this study. This group is an excellent and enjoyable way for elderly people to experience personal growth and form close friendships. With Birren and Deutchman's published book "How to Lead Autobiography Groups with Older Adults" activity directors, nurses, social workers, therapists and other professionals can lead autobiography groups and facilitate positive change on many levels (1993). The elderly are naturally engaged in the life review

process and "practioners need to develop skills in encouraging people to express their stories both orally and in writing" (Coleman, 1999, p.138).

We as a society need to keep our elders healthy and "health in old age involves mental and social as well as physical well being" (Butler, 1989, p.8). Groups such as the guided autobiography group that help facilitate personal growth, can be an important piece of the solution to reversing the well being declines in old age. "To age successfully could well become a leading challenge of our era" and programs that facilitate personal growth and increases in positive relations with others are part of the solution (Ryff, 1989, p.52).

This study demonstrates that levels of personal growth and positive relations with others were raised upon commencement of the five week autobiography course. This study provides no indication of whether this increase would be maintained over time. Haight, Michel and Hendrix are studying the long term effects of life review on elderly people, and have found substantial prolonged increases in well being, and

life satisfaction, along with decreases in depression and hopelessness up to 2 years after the life review treatment (2000). This is promising, and other researchers should study the long term effects of life review using alternate methods. It will prove "beneficial to assess the stability of such reminiscence typologies, especially with relation to increases or decreases in psychological distress" (Cully, LaVoie, & Gfetter, 2001, p.94).

Pairing Birren's Guided Autobiography Group Method and Ryff's Well Being Measure is a timely idea and worth pursuing further. Activities that promote successful aging are going to become more important as society ages (Ryff, 1989). Using the materials used in this study with a larger sample and a second post test would be a worthwhile future endeavor. Actively promoting successful aging is vital if our society is to continue to thrive.

APPENDIX A:  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### Informed Consent Form

My name is Karen Fagerstrom, I am a graduate student in the Life-Span Developmental Psychology Program at California State University, San Bernardino. With supervision from Dr. Joanna Worthley, I am conducting a research project on the effects that life review courses and other group courses have on well-being in the elderly.

If you consent to participate in the study, you will be asked to attend five, one-hour courses in life review. You will be asked to complete a well-being survey at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course. The survey will take approximately thirty minutes to complete.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary and you may choose not to answer a particular question in class or on the survey. You may withdraw from the study at any time and have your data removed without penalty. All information discussed in class or on the survey will be held in strict confidence. Data will be reported in a group format, and your name will not be associated with your answers. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Psychology Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino.

Participation in this study is intended increase your well-being and if successful hopefully more classes of this type will be conducted in the future.

At the conclusion of this study, you may receive a summary of the results. If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact Dr. Joanna Worthley at 909-880-5595. We thank you in advance for participating in the project.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature, purpose and criteria of this study, and I freely consent to participate.

Place an "X" Here: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



APPENDIX B:  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

My name is Karen Fagerstrom, I am a graduate student in the Life-Span Developmental Psychology Program at California State University, San Bernardino. With supervision from Dr. Joanna Worthley, I am conducting a research project on the effects that Group courses have on the psychological well-being of class participants.

If you consent to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a well-being survey at the beginning and at the ending of a five-week period. The survey and short demographic sheet are to be completed at home and handed in to your class instructor at the beginning of the next class session.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may choose not to answer one or all of the questions on this survey. You may withdraw from the study at any time and have your data removed without penalty. All information on the survey will be held in strict confidence. Data will be reported in a group format, and your name will not be associated with your answers. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Psychology Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino.

At the conclusion of this study, you may receive a summary of the results. If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact Dr. Joanna Worthley at 909-880-5595. We thank you in advance for participating in the project.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature, purpose and criteria of this study, and I freely consent to participate.

Place an "X" Here: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C:  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

My name is Karen Fagerstrom, I am a graduate student in the Life-Span Developmental Psychology Program at California State University, San Bernardino. With supervision from Dr. Joanna Worthley, I am conducting a research project on the effects that Guided Autobiography Group courses have on the well-being of class participants.

If you consent to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a well-being survey at the beginning and at the ending of this course.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may choose not to answer one or all of the questions on this survey. You may withdraw from the study at any time and have your data removed without penalty. All information on the survey will be held in strict confidence. Data will be reported in a group format, and your name will not be associated with your answers. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Psychology Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino.

At the conclusion of this study, you may receive a summary of the results. If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact Dr. Joanna Worthley at 909-880-5595. We thank you in advance for participating in the project.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature, purpose and criteria of this study, and I freely consent to participate.

Place an "X" Here: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D:

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

## Demographic Sheet

Please answer the following questions. Your answers are confidential.

### AGE

Please fill in the blank.

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

### RACE/ETHNICITY

Which of the following do you consider yourself to be? Check all that apply.

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Mexican-American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Don't know/Not sure

### EDUCATION

What is the highest grade or year of regular school you completed?

- ☐ Never attended/Kindergarten only

Please circle the number of years completed.

Elementary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
High School		1	2	3	4			
College		1	2	3	4			

Graduate School      1      2      3      4      5+

**GENDER**

Please circle:   MALE      FEMALE

**CURRENT MARITAL STATUS**

Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Never been married
- ☐ Member of an unmarried couple

**ANNUAL INCOME**

Please check your total annual income.

- ☐ Less than \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,001 - \$20,000
- ☐ \$20,001 - \$30,000
- ☐ \$30,001 - \$40,000
- ☐ More than \$40,000

**NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES**

How many organized group activities do you participate in during the average month? (Please check box)

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ 3-4
- ☐ 5-6
- ☐ 7-8
- ☐ 9-10
- ☐ 10+

APPENDIX E:  
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING SCALE



Psychological Well-Being

Carol Ryff, Ph.D.  
University of Wisconsin

Instructions:

This questionnaire contains statements related to well-being.

Please read each statement and decide how strongly you presently agree or disagree with the statement.

Please circle only one number on the six-point answer scale to indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

Please try to answer every item with your own personal opinion in regard to the statement.

Sample item: Please read the following statement and circle the number which best represents how strongly you presently agree or disagree with the statement.

Circle the number that best describes your present agreement or disagreement with each statement.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
1. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you for taking your time to read over these instructions, you may now turn the page and begin.

Circle the number that best describes you present agreement or disagreement with each statement.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
1. I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Most people see me as loving and affectionate.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. The demands of everyday life often get me down.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I don't want to try new ways of doing things--my life is fine the way it is.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I tend to focus on the present, because the future nearly always brings me problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I tend to worry about what other people think of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I do not fit very well with the people and community around me.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Circle the number that best describes you present agreement or disagreement with each statement.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
15. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. Being happy with myself is more important to me than having others approve of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members or friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. I like most aspects of my personality.	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. I don't have many people who want to listen when I need to talk.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Circle the number that best describes you present agreement or disagreement with each statement.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
29. I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. I generally do a good job taking care of my personal finances and affairs.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5	6
34. It seems to me that most other people have more friends that I do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
35. I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
37. It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters.	1	2	3	4	5	6
38. I am good at juggling my time so that I can fit everything in that needs to get done.	1	2	3	4	5	6
39. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.	1	2	3	4	5	6
40. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
41. I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Circle the number that best describes you present agreement or disagreement with each statement.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
42. My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6
43. I often change my mind about decisions if my friends or family disagree.	1	2	3	4	5	6
44. I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
45. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.	1	2	3	4	5	6
46. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
47. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
48. The past had its ups and downs, but in general, I wouldn't want to change it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
49. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.	1	2	3	4	5	6
50. I have been able to build a home and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking.	1	2	3	4	5	6
51. There is truth to the saying that you can't teach an old dog new tricks.	1	2	3	4	5	6
52. I know I can trust my friends and they know they can trust me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
53. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
54. When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX F:  
SENSITIZING QUESTIONS, SETTING I

Please write a three-page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 1: The Major Branching Points of Your Life

Think of your life as a branching tree, as a flowing river that has many juncture points, or as a trailing plant that puts down roots at various places and then goes on.

What is a *branching point*? Branching points are events, experiences, or happenings in our lives that significantly affect the direction or flow of our life. Branching points are experiences that shape our lives in some important way.

Branching points may be big events (e.g., marriage, retirement, geographical move) or they may seem small and apparently inconsequential (e.g., reading a book, going on a hike). Big outcomes may have small beginnings.

From your point of view, what were the major branching points in your life? What were the events, experiences, interactions with people and places that had a major influence or impact on the way your life has flowed?

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. About how old were you at the time of the branching point? Place the turning point along a time dimension. The timing of an event is often very important. Did it happen too soon? Were you too young? Did it happen too late? Were you too old?
2. Significant people? Who were the important people involved in the turning point? Father, mother, spouse? You alone? Often one notices that the same people are involved again and again in major life turning points.
3. Emotions and feelings at that time? What were the feelings, the emotions you experienced at the time the branching point occurred? How intense were these feelings (e.g., extremely elated, somewhat sad, a little frustrated, very happy)? Sometimes our feelings in reaction to an experience are mixed or are changeable. Do not be concerned if your feelings seem contradictory.
4. Emotions and feelings now? Sometimes our feelings about an experience or event change over time. Something that seemed a disaster when it happened may turn out to be a positive event later on and vice versa. What emotions do you experience as you think about the turning point now?
5. Personal choice? How much personal choice was involved in this branching point? How much personal control did you have? Was it something that happened that was completely out of your control? Who or what was the external influence?
6. Consequences? Branching points are "branching points" because they change our lives in one or many important ways. In your view, what are the ways your life was changed because of this branching point? What effect, impact, consequences did it have on your life? How would your life have been different if it had not occurred?

Please write a three-page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 2: Your Family

What is your family? The history of your family includes your family of origin (among them, grandparents, parents, siblings, uncles and aunts) as well as your family of adulthood (among them, spouse, children, grandchildren).

The family members important in shaping your life should be mentioned, not necessarily all the family members. Some have been more important in positive ways and some in negative ways in shaping your life.

What family members have had a major impact in shaping your life? Why?

What would another person have to know about your family in order to understand you and how you've come to be the person you are?

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. Who held the power in your family? Why? Who made the decisions? How did you know?
2. Who offered support, warmth, and nurturance? Why? Who did you go to for comfort? Who did you confide in?
3. What major family member(s) have you been closest to? Why?
4. What important family member did you know the least? Feel the least close to? Why? Who should you have been close to but for some reason were not?
5. Did you like your family? Why or why not?
6. What was best about your family? Worst about it? What were (are) the strengths and weaknesses in your family?
7. Was there anyone in your family you were afraid of? Why?
8. Who were the heroes in your family? The family favorites? How did you know?
9. What was the feeling tone in your family (e.g., happy, sad, crowded, spacious, noisy, quiet, warm, cold)?
10. What were the major areas of conflict, problems, and issues in your family?
11. What were the rules in your family, the "shoulds" and "oughts"?
12. What events and experiences have torn your family apart or have made your family stronger?
13. Were you loved? How did you know?



Please write a three-page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

### Assignment 3: Your Major Life Work or Career

What is a career? It's your major life's work. It occupies your energy, your activity, and your time. A career, a life work, can have many forms. Usually we think of it as work outside the home for pay. A life work can also be found in being a husband, a wife, a parent, or in religious devotion, in play, in art, in education, in community service. This does not necessarily involve a salary or pay. People can have a number of careers, a sequence of careers, or both.

What has been your major life's work or career?

### Sensitizing Questions

1. How did you get into your major life work? How did you find it? Did you choose it because your family expected it? Was it because of a teacher you knew? Did your appearance have anything to do with it? When did you begin your life work?
2. How early did you formulate your life career goals? What did you want to be when you grew up? How have childhood interests, passions, teachers influenced the path your life work has taken? How much choice did you have?
3. What has been the developmental course of your life work? Has it been continuous? Discontinuous? What have been the peaks and valleys? Have there been minor setbacks? Major changes in focus? Have you had a sequence or series of careers?
4. What have been the biggest influences in directing the path of your career once chosen? For example, they may have been people, places, events?
5. If you do not have a major life work (yet), what would you like to do? Why?
6. If you have finished your major life work, how do you evaluate it?
7. How has your work provided new options? Limited options?
8. Are you "on time" in your career, or ahead or behind in terms of your expectations?
9. What have been (are) the challenges of your life work? Your successes? The problems? The failures?
10. If you have more than one life-work identity, which of these has been most important to you? Why?
11. What has been unique or special about your work experiences? Place of work? Travel? People?
12. What have you enjoyed most about your life work? Least?
13. If you had to do it over again, how would you develop differently along your life-work path? Would you choose the same life work? Why or why not?

Please write a three-page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 4: The Role of Money in Your Life

Money is one of the most important themes in life. It has both an obvious and a subtle influence. Money touches many aspects of our lives – family, education, career, health, relationships with others, and self esteem.

Your attitude towards money has been shaped by many influences, both positive and negative.

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. What role did money play in your family? What were you taught about money? Was it scarce or plentiful? Were you poor or well off?
2. How did your family's money compare to other people's money?
3. In your life, how important is it to make money?
4. Does money have any relationship to love in your life? How?
5. What was the first time you earned any money? How did you feel about it? How did it affect your later ideas about money?
6. What have been your greatest financial successes?
7. What have been your worst financial mistakes?
8. How central is the role that money plays in your life?
9. Does money have any relationship to your self-esteem?
10. How much do you think about money? Do you worry about money?
11. Do you regard yourself as generous or stingy? Why?
12. Have you ever borrowed money? How did you feel about it?
13. Are you a good or a poor manager of money? Why?
14. Do you ever give money away? How do you feel about it?

Please write a three page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 5: Your Health and Body Image

The image of your body and your health has many aspects, objective features, and subjective feelings. In part, it involves an implied comparison with other persons, whether you were (are) more or less healthy, stronger or weaker, coordinated or clumsy, attractive or unattractive. How did you regard your body and health?

What has been the history of your health and body image?

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. What was your health like as a baby? As a child? Adolescent? Young adult? Middle-aged adult? Older adult?
2. Were you considered a sickly child? If so, what were the consequences for your development?
3. Were you a fast developing or slow developing child? Were you ahead or behind in growth as an adolescent?
4. What health problems have you experienced as in your life? How did you feel about each of these? How did you handle these problems?
5. How has your body reacted to games and athletic sports?
6. In what ways does your body react to stress? Has this changed during your life? What do you do in response to your body's stress signals?
7. What have you done during your life to help/hurt your health?
8. How would you describe your physical appearance as a baby? Child? Adolescent? Young adult? Middle aged adult? Older adult? Are (were) you short, tall, thin, fat, attractive, ugly, poised, awkward?
9. What part(s) of your body do you like least? Why? How has this changed over your life?
10. What part(s) of your body do you like most? Why? How has this changed over your life?
11. What have you done to alter, change, or improve your health and physical self during your life?
12. How do you regard your body in terms of female or male image?
13. If you could change your body in any way, how would you want to be different?

Please write a three page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

Assignment 6: Your Sexual Identity, Sex Roles, and Sexual Experiences

Sexuality includes our sense of ourselves as male or female (sexual identity), our ideas about appropriate sex role behavior, and our sexual experiences.

What has been the history of your sexual development, including the development of your identity as male/female, your concepts of appropriate sex role behavior, your sexual experiences?

Sensitizing Questions

1. When did you first learn/realize that you were a boy or a girl? When did you first learn that little boys and girls were different? How did you feel about that?
2. What toys did you use and what games did you play when you were a child? What significance did this have in the development of your sexual identity?
3. Were you a "tomboy"? A "sissy"? A "fraidy cat"? Did you ever wish you had been born the opposite sex? Why?
4. What did your parents, teachers, relatives teach you about what "good" girls and boys did and did not do? What were the rules for being a boy or a girl? What were your parent's views about your sexuality?
5. Where did you get your sex education (from parents, friends, books, school, religious training)? Where and when did you learn the facts of life?
6. What were your early sexual experiences (such as doctor and nurse games)? Did you have childhood sweet hearts?
7. Have you had traumatic sexual experiences?
8. What have your concepts or models of the "ideal" man or "ideal" woman? How have these ideas changed as you have grown up and grown older?
9. What are your concepts about the "ideal" relationship between two people?
10. How did you characterize yourself as a man or a woman? How has this changed? What "traditionally" masculine or feminine aspects can you identify in yourself?

Please write a three page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 7: Your Experiences with Death or Your Ideas about Death

Death can affect your life in many ways. You may have experienced the loss of a beloved pet as a child; you may have lost your parents, grandparents, dear friends, a spouse, a child, a brother or sister. Maybe the death of a political hero affected you profoundly.

How have your experiences with death affected your life and your character? How have your reactions to death change over the years? How have your ideas concerning your own death changed?

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. How did you feel about death when you were a child? Did you lose an animal that was a member of your family? What did you think when your pet died?
2. How was death talked about and treated in your family? Did it frighten you? How did you understand it?
3. When did you go to your first funeral? How did you react?
4. What effect did the threat of death in wartime have on you?
5. Were you ever so sick you thought you might die?
6. What have been the close calls with death? Have your ideas about your own death changed over the years? How do you feel about your death now?
7. How have you grieved?
8. Do dead parents, grandparents, spouses, or others continue to have an effect on your life?
9. Do you feel guilty about anyone's death? Helpless? Angry? Resentful? Abandoned? Have you ever felt responsible for anyone's death?
10. Have you ever killed anyone? How did you feel about it at the time? How do you feel about it now?
11. Did some great person's death (e.g. Kennedy or Roosevelt) have an effect on you?
12. Is death an enemy or a friend to you? Is it to be decreased and feared, or welcomed?
13. What kind of death would you like to have?
14. If you could talk to a dead person, what would you ask him or her?
15. What was the most significant death you have experienced? How did it change you or your life?

Please write a two page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

Assignment 8: Your Loves and Hates

Love is a strong emotional attachment to a particular person, place, or thing. Absence of the love object causes distress in the form of loneliness, anxiety, and longing. What have been the major loves of your life?

Hate is a strong feeling of dislike or ill will toward some person, place, or thing. What have been then hates or strong aversions in your life?

1. What persons, places, or things aroused your greatest feelings of love when you were a child?
2. Who was your first love?
3. Who in your life made you feel loved and why?
4. Were you ever consumed by love? When and under what circumstances?
5. What has been the role of love in your life? How has it changed over time?
6. Why did your loves end? What happened when you lose a love? How did your feelings change or did you lose the object of your love?
7. How have your ideas about love changed over your life?
8. What have been the major hates of your life? What kind of places, people, events, characteristics of people, objects, ideas, or kinds of behavior cause you to feel extreme dislike?
9. What were your major dislikes as a child? How did they change with time?
10. Have you ever hated someone so much you wished they would die?
11. How have you expressed your hatred?
12. Have your hates changed over the years, or have they remained the same?
13. If you could wish ill upon some person by voodoo or magic, who would it be?
14. Do you express your hate or keep it inside?
15. Do you have some strong unexpressed feelings of love for some person, place or thing?
16. When you were growing up what were you taught about love and hate? How have your ideas changed?

Please write a two page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 9: The Meaning of Your Life, and Your Aspirations and Life Goals

Questions of meaning, values, morality, and religion are often elusive and difficult to articulate. Human life is characterized by moral complexity and ambiguity. Often the black and white of childhood, the simple delineation of right and wrong, changes to large areas of gray in our adult lives. Questions of value and meaning, religion and morality, are often fraught with contradiction. Some people become moral gymnasts, stretching and bending with agility in the moral realm of life. Others find their home in a traditional religious philosophy and structure. Numerous people today claim to have "their own religion", an eclectic synthesis of many diverse elements. Still others avow atheism or agnosticism. Secular humanism claims a large following in contemporary culture.

How do your life goals fit into your beliefs and values? How have you set your life goals? What are they? Trace the history of your moral or religious development. How has it changed through your life? Do you have a philosophy of life? What is it? What does your life mean? What does human life in general mean?

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. What kinds of different goals do you have - material, social, personal, universal, moral, religious - and how important are they to you? Have your goals always been the same?
2. Were there any religious traditions in your home as a child? Have you carried them on? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever had a religious experience? What were you doing and where did it happen? How did you react?
4. What symbols, either religious or secular, are significant for you? Why?
5. What are the principals that guide your life? What are your standards? What does it mean if you do not live up to them?
6. What has been your purpose in life? Have you had more than one purpose? How has this purpose (or these purposes) changed?
7. Do you find meaning in the idea of social justice, prosperity, or the brotherhood of man? How do you act on these ideas?
8. Do you want to emulate some great figure (e.g. Moses, Gandhi, Christ, Schweitzer, Eleanor Roosevelt)? Who are your moral heroes? Have they changed over time?
9. Were you taught not to be cruel to animals so that you would not be cruel to people? What is your relationship to the natural world?
10. Have you ever found life meaningless? Did it fill you with despair? Did you come to some understanding?
11. Why be moral? WHY BE?

APPENDIX G:

SENSITIZING QUESTIONS, SETTING II



Please write a two page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 1: The Major Branching Points of Your Life

Think of your life as a branching tree, as a flowing river that has many juncture points, or as a trailing plant that puts down roots at various places and then goes on.

What is a branching point? Branching points are events, experiences, or happenings in our lives that significantly affect the direction or flow of our life. Branching points are experiences that shape our lives in some important way.

Branching points may be big events (e.g., marriage, retirement, geographical move) or they may seem small and apparently inconsequential (e.g., reading a book, going on a hike). Big outcomes may have small beginnings.

From your point of view, what were the major branching points in your life? What were the events, experiences, interactions with people and places that had a major influence or impact on the way your life has flowed?

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. About how old were you at the time of the branching point? Place the turning point along a time dimension. The timing of an event is often very important. Did it happen too soon? Were you too young? Did it happen too late? Were you too old?
2. Significant people? Who were the important people involved in the turning point? Father, mother, spouse? You alone? Often one notices that the same people are involved again and again in major life turning points.
3. Emotions and feelings at that time? What were the feelings, the emotions you experienced at the time the branching point occurred? How intense were these feelings (e.g., extremely elated, somewhat sad, a little frustrated, very happy)? Sometimes our feelings in reaction to an experience are mixed or are changeable. Do not be concerned if your feelings seem contradictory.
4. Emotions and feelings now? Sometimes our feelings about an experience or event change over time. Something that seemed a disaster when it happened may turn out to be a positive event later on and vice versa. What emotions do you experience as you think about the turning point now?
5. Personal choice? How much personal choice was involved in this branching point? How much personal control did you have? Was it something that happened that was completely out of your control? Who or what was the external influence?
6. Consequences? Branching points are "branching points" because they change our lives in one or many important ways. In your view, what are the ways your life was changed because of this branching point? What effect, impact, consequences did it have on your life? How would your life have been different if it had not occurred?

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Please write a two page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

#### Assignment 2: Your Family

What is your family? The history of your family includes your family of origin (among them, grandparents, parents, siblings, uncles and aunts) as well as your family of adulthood (among them, spouse, children, grandchildren).

The family members important in shaping your life should be mentioned, not necessarily all the family members. Some have been more important in positive ways and some in negative ways in shaping your life.

What family members have had a major impact in shaping your life? Why?

What would another person have to know about your family in order to understand you and how you've come to be the person you are?

#### Sensitizing Questions

1. Who held the power in your family? Why? Who made the decisions? How did you know?
2. Who offered support, warmth, and nurturance? Why? Who did you go to for comfort? Who did you confide in?
3. What major family member(s) have you been closest to? Why?
4. What important family member did you know the least? Feel the least close to? Why? Who should you have been close to but for some reason were not?
5. Did you like your family? Why or why not?
6. What was best about your family? Worst about it? What were (are) the strengths and weaknesses in your family?
7. Was there anyone in your family you were afraid of? Why?
8. Who were the heroes in your family? The family favorites? How did you know?
9. What was the feeling tone in your family (e.g., happy, sad, crowded, spacious, noisy, quiet, warm, cold)?
10. What were the major areas of conflict, problems, and issues in your family?
11. What were the rules in your family, the "shoulds" and "oughts"?
12. What events and experiences have torn your family apart or have made your family stronger?
13. Were you loved? How did you know?

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Please write a two page response to these questions to share with the group next week. You do not need to address every question in your paper, only the ones that are significant for you.

### Assignment 3: Your Major Life Work or Career

What is a career? It's your major life's work. It occupies your energy, your activity, and your time. A career, a life work, can have many forms. Usually we think of it as work outside the home for pay. A life work can also be found in being a husband, a wife, a parent, or in religious devotion, in play, in art, in education; in community service. This does not necessarily involve a salary or pay. People can have a number of careers, a sequence of careers, or both.

What has been your major life's work or career?

### Sensitizing Questions

1. How did you get into your major life work? How did you find it? Did you choose it because your family expected it? Was it because of a teacher you knew? Did your appearance have anything to do with it? When did you begin your life work?
2. How early did you formulate your life career goals? What did you want to be when you grew up? How have childhood interests, passions, teachers influenced the path your life work has taken? How much choice did you have?
3. What has been the developmental course of your life work? Has it been continuous? Discontinuous? What have been the peaks and valleys? Have there been minor setbacks? Major changes in focus? Have you had a sequence or series of careers?
4. What have been the biggest influences in directing the path of your career once chosen? For example, they may have been people, places, events?
5. If you do not have a major life work (yet), what would you like to do? Why?
6. If you have finished your major life work, how do you evaluate it?
7. How has your work provided new options? Limited options?
8. Are you "on time" in your career, or ahead or behind in terms of your expectations?
9. What have been (are) the challenges of your life work? Your successes? The problems? The failures?
10. If you have more than one life-work identity, which of these has been most important to you? Why?
11. What has been unique or special about your work experiences? Place of work? Travel? People?
12. What have you enjoyed most about your life work? Least?
13. If you had to do it over again, how would you develop differently along your life-work path? Would you choose the same life work? Why or why not?

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