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A Narrative Study: Exploration of Arts and Crafts as Meaningful Productivity in a Middle-Old Adult who Resides in an Independent Living Facility

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A Narrative Study: Exploration of Arts and Crafts as Meaningful Productivity in a Middle-Old Adult who Resides in an Independent Living Facility

By

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THESIS

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A Narrative Study:
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Sara Thornburg
2007
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the meaningfulness of engagement in arts and crafts in one older adult who resides in an independent living facility. A narrative approach was used and one participant was purposefully selected for the study. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. Additional data sources included the participant’s book of memories, artifacts, and photos. Analysis consisted of thorough readings of the data and the development of a chronology from the participant’s stories and book of memories. Participant feedback and peer debriefing was elicited in order to insure validity of the researcher’s findings. Consistent with narrative research, the researcher retold the participant’s story within a structure of five life stages. Within each life stage, the participant’s engagement in arts and crafts was explored. The researcher discussed conclusions regarding the meaningfulness of arts and crafts in each life stage of the participant’s life. An application of the findings was made to occupational therapy practice and suggestions for further research were proposed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

A large segment of American society that is commonly referred to as the “baby boomers” is comprised of individuals who were born between 1946 and 1964. Those individuals who were born in 1946 will turn 61 years old in 2007 and will begin entering retirement. The United States Census indicates that by the year 2010, 13 percent of the United States population will be over the age of 65. By the year 2050 that percentage will increase to 20.7 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). According to the US Census, by the year 2030, 57.8 million baby boomers will be between 66 and 84 years of age (US Census Bureau, Newsroom, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/006105.html, retrieved February 4, 2007). These are staggering numbers. It behooves the occupational therapy community to take a serious look at the important occupations and needs of this aging population.

Among the most fundamental needs of any individual is the need for meaningful and productive occupations (Kielhofner, 2004). “The ability to be productive is as essential to who we are as people, as occupational beings” (Pierce, 2003). As individuals retire and enter older adulthood, several challenges arise, including the need to continue engaging in meaningful and productive activities. The current study will explore the stories and experiences of an older adult’s engagement in arts and crafts and how that occupation provides him or her with an opportunity for meaningful productivity. The study will focus on a specific portion of the older adult population, namely, adults who
are between the ages of 75 and 84, referred to as middle-old adults, and living in an independent living facility (ILF).

Problem Statement

The aim of this study is to provide an in-depth look into the occupational needs of middle-old adults as it relates to engagement in arts and crafts. The needs of the growing older adult population are a significant issue in the occupational therapy community, as occupational therapists look forward to serving an increasing number of older adults in the next decade. Further understanding is needed to equip the occupational therapy community with greater appreciation for the ordinary, yet significantly meaningful occupations in which older adults engage as they transition through the stages of adulthood.

A thorough understanding of the needs of older adults requires more than a broad quantitative analysis. A narrative study uniquely extracts and interprets individual stories and personal experiences that provide insights that are candid and authentic.

Also, this study will fill a void in research on the topic of crafting as productivity in the older adult population. There is minimal research regarding the meaningfulness of engagement in arts and crafts in older adults, possibly overlooked because of the ordinariness of its nature and assumed presence. The current literature review will highlight research that has been conducted in the area of older adults’ occupations; however, there is an absence of narrative research on this topic.

Purpose

The purpose of the current narrative study is to explore and understand the experiences of engagement in meaningful productivity via arts and crafts for a middle-old
adult over the life span and who has transitioned to an ILF. The intent of the narrative format is to collect stories from the participant about his or her engagement in arts and crafts with a focus on current crafting during older adulthood. The participant’s stories will be retold in narrative form focusing on the meaningfulness of engagement in crafting as a form of productivity, as defined by the participant. This research will be helpful in generating questions for further specific, or larger, studies that address the occupational needs of similar older adult populations.

Research Questions

The overarching question of this study is: how has engagement in arts and crafts affected an older adult’s life?

Subquestions for further study include: what experiences or stories can this individual share about his or her art or craft? How have those experiences added meaning to his or her life? Has crafting been a source of productivity for this individual? Has the meaning of engagement in crafting changed since entering retirement age and transitioning into an ILF?

Significance

An exploration of the use of crafting in the life of an older adult is an important contribution to a deeper understanding of the needs of the aging community. This community will increasingly demand closer consideration by the occupational therapy profession.

Consideration of some basic facts regarding aging trends is noteworthy. As medicine and technology advance, people are living longer. Not only are they living longer, but they are living better. In 1950, Americans who retired at 65 years of age, were
generally expected to live another 14 years. That number has increased to an expected 18 years on average to spend in retirement after age 65 (Achenbaum, 2006). Previously disabling conditions are now treatable due to advances in medicine and technology. Health has generally improved in the baby boomers. The result is an extension of their productive years and a desire to engage in active meaningful occupations (de Bruin & Firkin).

As occupational therapists encounter the needs of the baby boomers in years to come, a greater understanding of their unique life situations is critical. Needs arise from this period of life that are accentuated by the knowledge of advancing age and a congruent desire for meaningful living.

An exploration of various aspects of fulfillment in older adulthood is important to occupational therapist practice. This study will explore one common aspect, namely engagement in arts and crafts. It is purported by the researcher that an in-depth description of the experiences of an older adult as he or she has engaged in crafting can contribute to practicing occupational therapists in several ways.

First of all, it is hoped that this study will raise awareness among occupational therapists regarding the occupational needs of the retiring baby boomers and the current retired population. The needs addressed most specifically in this study are the need for sustaining meaningful creativity as experienced across the life span and the need to remain productive. Secondly, it is hoped that occupational therapists, regardless of the elder-care setting in which they work, may be persuaded to encourage older adults to actively pursue their chosen creative craft. Thirdly, in accordance with occupational therapy's core values, it is hoped that occupational therapists will use this study to further
understand and respect the elderly, and encourage their autonomy through the “capacity to influence their environment” (Bruin & Firkin, 2001, Self-Employment of the Older Worker, Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme, Massey University, Auckland, p. 9). Finally, it is the researcher's desire that occupational therapists will be inspired to promote the older adult's ability to be productive. A definition of productivity will vary from one individual to another. For some it may be the ability to make gifts for friends and family. Others may highly value economic rewards of crafting. Irregardless of the individual differences in defining productivity, it is the occupational therapist's goal to facilitate the older adult's “abilities to be self-reliant; to personally affect their economic and physical well-being; and to adapt to life change” (Bruin & Firkin, 2001, p. 9).
Definitions

**Arts and Crafts:** Two folk terms that refer to two separate, and yet similar, creative disciplines. “Art” generally refers to objects created primarily for aesthetic appreciation by an “artist”. “Crafts” are objects created by “craftsman” and may be more utilitarian in nature. However, the two terms are used interchangeably, as these distinctions overlap when used in a common and “folk” sense (Becker, 1978). For the purposes of this study, the term “arts and crafts” will be used interchangeably to describe simple or complex creative objects, which are used for aesthetic purposes and/or utilitarian purposes.

**Crafting:** For the purposes of this study, this term will refer to the activity of engaging in creative and artistic occupations.

**Independent living community:** Retirement communities consisting of homes, condominiums or apartments for retired individuals who desire to live independently but who are unable, or do not desire, to maintain a home. These communities may offer a range of amenities that allow residents to continue to experience personal independence and continue to engage in social life and community service. Amenities may include transportation services, social activities, craft and/or woodworking shops, meals, and housekeeping services (AARP, n.d.).

**Middle-Old Adult:** Adults between the ages of 75 and 84 (Older adult: For the purpose of this study, the older adult is defined as someone of retirement age, generally 65 years of age or older.

**Narrative research:** A type of qualitative research which explores the stories and lived experiences of individuals mostly through the means of in-depth interviews. A detailed
account of these experiences is retold and meanings explored for the purpose of contributing deeper understanding into the lives of individuals (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2007).
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of a literature review in a qualitative study differs in several ways from that of a quantitative study. There is, however, one fundamental similarity: to report the previous studies and related literature to the reader. The basic purpose of a qualitative study is that of exploration, as opposed to answering a clearly defined question, as in quantitative research. In quantitative research, the literature review is typically an extensive discussion of previous studies and published literature that have addressed the research question (Kielhofner, 2006). Generally, in quantitative research, the direction of the proposed research is clearly defined and the literature review is used deductively as a platform on which to justify a study of the research question (Creswell, 2003).

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative researchers adopt an observational/exploratory posture. In other words, rather than answering a question, researchers seek to explore or better understand a person or phenomena. Research topics naturally arise from the participants' disclosures. This method is similar to grounded theory research, an inductive method of research developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 (Creswell, 2007). Glaser and Strauss purport that theory is not developed in an intellectual vacuum, but rather is intimately tied to, and arises out of, data from research participants. Consequently, grounded theory research does not approach a problem with a theory or solution, but rather explores the individuals, actions, interactions, and social structures of a group in order to arrive at a
theory (Creswell, 2007).

An overly specific direction for narrative research is neither desired nor recommended; instead the researcher listens to the participants and takes direction from their responses (Creswell, 2003). A qualitative literature review must reflect this fundamental exploratory approach. Creswell (2003) indicates that the most desired approach for a literature review in qualitative research is an inductive approach. Literature related to the general topic for exploration is reviewed briefly in the proposal stage (providing an initial framework), and then incorporated throughout the research as themes develop from the research itself (Creswell, 2003).

This study considered two important elements in the literature review. First, a general overview of literature was provided in the proposal portion of the research. This general review of literature focused on the topics of arts and crafts, creativity, meaningful occupation for older adults, older adults and productivity, and the use of arts and crafts by older adults as a means of productivity. Secondly, the importance of this study was incorporated throughout the literature review. In particular, a need for further exploration of the topic of crafting as meaningful productivity in older adults was proposed from the literature reviewed. Literature from the fields of occupational therapy, psychology, sociology, and art were incorporated.

Understanding Qualitative Research

Qualitative research seeks greater knowledge and understanding through exploration of human experience within natural contexts, and through identification and description of the meanings of those experiences (Kielhofner, 2006). In recent years, qualitative research has become an increasingly popular research method among health
professionals. This may be due, in part, to awareness that quantitative research alone is not adequate in studying the complexities of human behavior. Qualitative research aims to uncover the richness of people’s lives and their lived experiences. These are best understood through holistic exploration of the subjects’ environment, past and present events, beliefs and values, occupations, and their personal interpretations of various aspects of their lives (Wicks & Whiteford, 2006) The fields of occupational science and occupational therapy are particularly suited to this type of research. A phenomenologically-focused and holistic field, occupational therapy is concerned with the meaningful occupations of individuals and the circumstances that affect those occupations (Wicks & Whiteford).

**Rationale for Narrative Approach**

Several methods of data collection are used in qualitative research (ethnographies, case studies, etc.). This study employed a narrative approach. Narrative research is characterized primarily by storytelling (Creswell, 2003). A feature article in the *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* provides this definition of a narrative: “A narrative is a collection of events, experiences, and perceptions that are put together into a meaningful whole and understood/told as a story” (Goldstein, Kielhofner & Paul-Ward, 2004, p. 119). Narrative research, therefore, is research that elicits narratives (or stories) from the subjects. This is primarily accomplished through an interview process and the essential development of a trusting relationship between the researcher and the subject (Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000). Narrative studies capture the impact of various factors such as culture, psychosocial components, political or economical realities, spiritual dimensions, dynamics of change, and relationships. Through storytelling, insights into
human experience are collected, explored, categorized, and then reiterated to provide therapists with a more profound awareness of human conditions and, consequently, a keener ability to find effective treatment.

Two researchers, Allison Wicks and Gail Whiteford, who have written on the subject of narrative methods, indicate that narrative research is particularly useful in occupational therapy and yet “remain(s) relatively unexplored in the literature” (Wicks & Whiteford, 2006, p. 94). There is, however, an increasing appreciation for this type of research in the occupational therapy/science community, as it has been shown to be useful not only in understanding more deeply the lives of clients, but also in providing a link between human experience and therapy outcomes (Wicks & Whiteford). Goldstein, Kielhofner, and Paul-Ward (2004) explored this concept in their study on the relationship between narratives and therapeutic process. They conducted a narrative study on two persons living with AIDS, and found that the narratives helped the therapists to tailor their intervention approaches and also to predict the outcomes of occupational therapy (Goldstein, et al).

**History of Arts and Crafts and Occupational Therapy**

Literature on the history of occupational therapy is rich with the use of arts and crafts as a form of intervention. Occupational therapy was born just prior to the Arts and Crafts Movement of the early 20th century. The Arts and Crafts Movement was a reaction to the mass production of goods brought about by the Industrial Revolution. As mass manufacturing replaced craftsmanship, two leading Englishmen, John Ruskin, a philosopher, and William Morris, a British designer, began a movement to bring back the quality and beauty of craftsmanship. These men promoted creating and selling hand-
made objects for household use. As a result, there was a resurgence of interest in handcrafted furniture, textiles, stained glass, and similar household items. Furthermore, individuals who promoted this movement philosophized that the lifestyle of industrialization lacked the moral values and meaningfulness that could be found in a simpler and more creative lifestyle. Historical literature in occupational therapy indicates that the founders believed arts and crafts provided opportunities for "creativity, independent decision-making, engagement of both mind and body, and personal satisfaction" (Punwar & Peloquin, 2000, p. 23). During the early 1900's, Herbert James Hall, a graduate of Harvard Medical School, promoted the value and use of arts and crafts in the treatment of mental illness (Kielhofner, 2004). The literature on Hall's philosophy indicates that he believed crafting gave patients a sense of success. He conducted research to support his theory that arts and crafts could be used effectively to restore and maintain mental health (Kielhofner, 2004). Susan Cox Johnson, a key founder of occupational therapy, promoted the usefulness of handicrafts as a treatment technique. She suggested that handicrafts provided individuals with benefits ranging from self-confidence to physical strengthening (Schwartz, 2003). The writings of Susan Elizabeth Tracy emphasized the use of arts such as the making of "rugs and finer fabrics, basket work, bookbinding and clay modeling", again as a treatment for the mentally ill (Tracy, as cited in Schwartz, 2003). William Rush Dunton, in his writings on the subject of humanitarian treatment of individuals with mental illness during the early 1900's, emphasized the use of crafts such as metal and leather work, raffia and basket work, and weaving for the purpose of relieving patients' boredom and reducing misbehavior (Schwartz, 2003).
One of the anticipated benefits of the current study will be the re-exploration of arts and crafts as meaningful productivity and occupation, as was demonstrated in the foundational beliefs of the founders of occupational therapy. The current research will focus on crafting as a meaningful lifetime occupation, which in turn may be applied to occupational therapy theory and treatment.

Modern Day Concepts Arts and Crafts and Creativity

Modern day crafting continues to be an important meaningful occupation and a creative medium of personal expression for people of all ages (Hickson & Housley, 1997). Occupational therapy has seen a gradual homecoming to its philosophical roots, including its beginnings in the Arts and Crafts Movement. A study such as this one is particularly important in recapturing the meaningfulness of crafting as occupation (La Cour, Josephsson, & Luborsky, 2005).

Literature on creativity implies that arts and crafts may be distinguished from one another, as well as being viewed as one and the same. Historically, the term craft implied that a craftsman had formed an object for purely utilitarian purposes, requiring skills which are learned for that specific purpose. An artist, however, was viewed as creating an item purely for its beauty or visual appreciation (Becker, 1978). While these notions are still somewhat in existence, there is also a blending of the two (Becker, 1978). In referring to this blending, sociologist Howard Becker uses the term “artist-craftsmen” and suggests that useful crafted items are also recognized for their beauty. Therefore, crafts may become art and, vice versa, art may become craft (Becker, 1978).

Occupational therapy theorists have also noted the importance of creativity as a means of personal expression. Wilcock states that creativity is a complex human capacity...
and adds that it is an impulse or drive basic to humans (Wilcock, 2006). William Morris believed that creating something provided man with an exercise of body, soul, and mind (Morris, as cited in Wilcock, 2006).

Meaningful Occupation for Older Adults

A discussion of meaningful occupation must first begin by addressing the term 'meaningful occupation'. While many definitions of occupation can be found in occupational therapy literature, in its most concise form occupation refers to those activities that occupy a person's time, energy, and attention, or "engagement in something" (Reed & Sanderson, 1999, p. 3). Occupations fall into three fundamental categories in occupational therapy literature: self-care, productivity or work, and leisure. Reed and Sanderson define meaningfulness as an individual's values and beliefs, and those things that are important to a person. Things that are meaningful provide motivation (Reed & Sanderson, 1999). The classic writings of Mary Reilly, prominent occupational therapist of the 1960's and 1970's, further suggest that engagement in meaningful occupations constitutes one of the basic needs of humans (Kielhofner, 2004).

The Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) underscores three components of human occupation: volition, habituation, and performance capacity (Kielhofner, 2004). Kielhofner asserts that people choose what they want to do based upon how effective they perceive they are in that occupation, what their values and interests are, and what is enjoyable. Kielhofner also suggests that people are shaped by what they choose to do and that occupation is a dynamic process, changing due to context, ability, and personal choice (Kielhofner, 2004).

The occupational choices and patterns of older adults is a topic worthy of
consideration. Older adults comprise a growing portion of America's population. The unique occupational needs of this population have been examined in previous studies. Wilcock suggests that in light of post-retirement changes, finding meaning and fulfillment for the older adult greatly affects the ability to thrive (Wilcock, 2003). The World Health Organization's document, *Active Ageing*, speaks of crucial issues for the aging public with regard to occupation, recognizing that "independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment, and dignity" are essential for successful aging (Wilcock, 2003). The landmark Well Elderly Study, conducted by the University of Southern California, is an outstanding example of the importance of researching the needs of the elderly in America (USC Well Elderly Study, 1997). The largest study conducted in the field of occupational therapy, the Well Elderly Study focused on the impact of preventative occupational therapy programs in a diverse elderly population. A total of 361 individuals between the ages of 60 and 89 were divided into three groups. One group received occupational therapy services on a weekly basis, one group engaged in social activities for 2¾ hours weekly, and the third group, a control group, received no special services. The study was conducted over a nine month period. Findings strongly demonstrated that the group receiving occupational therapy services showed significant positive health benefits from engaging in occupational therapy activities.

Every age group has their own peculiar occupations which they find meaningful. Furthermore, every individual within each age group engages in occupations that meet their specific needs. From the research on meaningful occupations for the older adult, several patterns emerge. Naturally, extraneous issues such as health, mobility, cultural and family relationships, socioeconomic status, and residence may directly or indirectly
affect occupational engagements for older adults (Bjorklund & Henriksson, 2003).

Intrinsic factors such as motivation, interest, emotional, psychological, and intellectual barriers also play a large role in occupational choices. Haggblom-Kronlof and Sonn (2005) conducted research exploring the interests of 86-year-old Australians who continued to reside in their own homes. They found that the most common occupations older adults value are media interests (listening to radio, watching TV, reading newspapers and books, doing crossword puzzles, and writing) and individual leisure activities (physical exercise, gardening, crafts and art activities, cooking/baking, pools/lottery, collecting, fishing/sailing/golf, housekeeping, music listening/playing, and driving/working on car). The study concludes that occupations of interest to an older adult are powerful motivators for treatment in occupational therapy. The researchers encourage further research to determine how occupations are experienced by older adults and how these occupations enrich their lives and contribute to mental, psychological, and physical well being. They further suggest that such research would contribute significantly to occupational therapy theory development and treatment programs for the aging population.

The current study aims to contribute to that knowledge base and provide a deeper understanding of the meaning and importance of occupations for older adults, particularly in a stage of life when occupations are changing and are significantly affected by contextual influences (i.e., declining health).

Older Adults and Meaningful Productivity

Webster defines the word 'produce' as “to cause to have existence or to happen; to give being, form, or shape to; to compose, create, or bring out by intellectual or physical
effort” (Merriam-Webster, 1993). Reed and Sanderson limit productivity to the scope of work, or activities that assist and contribute to society (Reed & Sanderson, 1999). According to Pierce (2003), productivity falls within a subjective dimension of occupation and includes not only work, but also activities that relieve boredom, stress, and promote personal identity. Pierce's use of the concept of productivity allows for pleasure, appeal, and leisure to be interconnected with work. This approach does not restrict productivity to non-creative occupations but allows for the unique experiences of individuals. Referring to their unpublished study on the interconnection between productivity, pleasure, and restoration, Zemke & Pierce (1994) call for further research on the subject of this interconnection. They suggest that pleasure can reach high levels during productivity, but that restoration and productivity do not often reach high levels simultaneously in the same activity.

Productive activities among older adults have been shown to contribute significantly to greater life satisfaction as well as lowering mortality rates. A 13-year study examining the relationship between social, productive, and physical activity in 2,812 older Americans found that involvement in those occupations that required little or no physical exertion was effective in lowering the risk of death (Glass, de Leon, Marottoli, & Bertkman, 1999). Similarly, Bjorklund and Henriksson's pilot-study (2003), a qualitative descriptive project, found that a majority of the study's 13 participants considered productivity, or the ability to go to places where they could be productive, as “extremely important.” The lack of the ability to go places where they could be productive was viewed as a source of frustration. Consistent with the exploratory purposes of qualitative research, this study allowed the selected participant to define...
productivity within the context of her own experiences.

**Arts and Crafts as Meaningful Productivity**

The use of arts and crafts as a meaningful occupation has been studied in the field of occupational therapy as well as in other fields of human study. In the la Cour, Josephsson, and Luborsky (2005) study of a small sample of elderly persons facing life-threatening illnesses, they concluded that, among other discoveries, engaging in arts and crafts enabled the participants to reconnect with life as they faced major changes. Engagement in arts and crafts assisted them in facing grief and other psychosocial issues at the end of life. Furthermore, creative activities helped the subjects to reconnect with their cultural ideals and personal values, as well as remember past experiences and identities (la Cour, et al, 2005).

Literature in other fields of study also addresses the value of creative occupations. A study conducted by Mark Runco, psychologist at California State University, examined 20 years of creativity research (Runco, 2004). This extensive project examined research findings about the “clear benefits . . . [creativity has] for individuals and society as a whole” (Runco, 2004, p. 1). Runco (2004) discovered that creative art forms are “more important than ever before” (Runco, 2004, p. 2) and that creativity “enhances problem solving, adaptability, self-expression, and health” (Runco, 2004, p. 18). An interesting aspect of the meaningfulness of creative activity is that it can be a healthy reaction to the challenges of life, a sort of oasis from difficulty, illness, change, etc. (Runco, 2004). Older adults face several such challenges during the aging process.

**Summary**

Available literature on arts and crafts as meaningful occupation is surprisingly
scarce in occupational therapy research. Not only has this researcher found that to be true, but a similar reference to this was made in a 2004 research article from Australia. Theresa Schmid points out that even with occupational therapy history deeply rooted in arts and crafts, "there has been little discussion about the meaning of creativity within the occupational therapy context" (Schmid, 2004, p. 80). Most of the literature for this study is based upon research in European countries. On the other hand, fields such as sociology, psychology, education, and the arts have published extensively on creativity. When used in occupational therapy literature, creativity has been approached primarily from the perspective of problem solving and creative clinical reasoning, rather than from a patient’s point of view through engagement in arts and crafts.

It is the personal belief of this researcher that the simplicity of engagement in arts and crafts may cause it to be overlooked as a means of meaningful productivity in older adults. The lack of sophistication in some current arts and crafts may contribute to this devaluation of their significance. Yet, with a growing elderly population in America, and the consequent need for this population to continue to maintain a sense of meaning, enjoyment and productivity, it is vital that occupational therapists understand the role that crafting may play in their lives. The product created may or may not be viewed as useful or aesthetically beautiful in the eyes of others, yet the act of creating provides the older adult with a sense of purpose and productivity as well as enjoyment.

The main focus of this study is on the value and meaning of creative activities for older adults. A narrative approach to this topic will be of great benefit to occupational therapists in helping them to understand the deep significance of ordinary occupations for the older adult. Ordinary occupations are what comprise the daily lives of people, and
people choose those occupations based on what is important, valuable, or meaningful to them (Reed & Sanderson, 1999). Narrative researchers have a unique approach to a participant, desiring to fully understand his or her life and what makes it meaningful. The awareness raised by this research will enable therapists to understand and encourage the ordinary crafting activities of older adults. The focus on arts and crafts will be a reminder to the occupational therapy community of the roots of their profession in the arts and crafts, reconnecting them with those fundamental roots.

It is important to note that studies such as this one should be periodically repeated in order to identify occupational changes in subsequent generations. The findings of the current study will differ from findings found in the next generation, when baby boomers reach the middle-old adult age group of 75 to 84 years old. Studies suggest that baby boomers will be more active at this age, perhaps spending more time in volunteerism (Salls, 2004) or part time employment (AARP, 2004). However, AARP's 2004 survey of baby boomers' expectations for retirement indicates that baby boomers continue to view retirement in the traditional sense, as a period in which to invest time in family, leisure, and the pursuit of hobbies and interests (AARP, 2004).
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Rationale

This study utilized a qualitative narrative research design. The intent of this study was to conduct an in-depth exploration into the meaning of productive engagement in arts or crafts to a middle-old adult who had transitioned to living in an independent living facility. A narrative approach was chosen in which the researcher attempted to establish a relationship with the participant. This was accomplished through the use of semi-structured interview sessions and two informal photography sessions.

Narrative research is particularly focused on the stories of the participants, and on the meaning they attribute to their experiences. This approach is especially useful when the goal of research is to conduct richer exploration than quantitative research allows. A narrative approach is suited to the goal of exploration of both extraordinary and ordinary people, experiences, events, and/or occupations (Creswell, 2007). The intent of the researcher in the current study was to gain a richer understanding of an ordinary, typical activity (crafting), which holds importance and meaning to an older adult. The use of a narrative research method allowed the researcher to deeply explore the experience of arts and crafts across the lifespan as a meaningful productive activity. Because narrative research is somewhat loosely structured and questions are open-ended, the participant was free to relate her story without the limitations of structured inquiries such as questionnaires (Kielhofner, 2006). Narrative research was ideal for uncovering the complexities of her perceptions in a personal context.
Participant Selection

In narrative research, a small purposeful sample is preferred. This person may be a marginalized individual, an important political figure, or an ordinary individual who clearly represents a majority of persons in society (Creswell, 2007). The researcher specifically chooses an individual, or individuals, who will contribute to a greater understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2007). Consistent with these narrative research methods, one participant was chosen for this study. Criterion sampling was used to guide the selection process. The criteria were as follows:

- Male or female
- Between the ages of 75 and 84
- Living in an independent living facility
- Currently engaged in an art or craft
- Able to use verbal communication effectively
- Able to understand the intent of the study
- Available for one to two interview sessions, a photo session, and a final session to review data from the initial interview

Following HRRC approval, contacts were established by telephone with two administrative personnel in two local ILFs. Letters requesting a volunteer for the study were distributed by the administrative personnel (see Appendix A). A period of four weeks was allowed for volunteer responses. A total of four forms with names and phone numbers of volunteers were received by the researcher. These forms were placed in an envelope and a random selection was made by the researcher.

The selected participant was a 79-year-old female who resides with her husband.
in a local ILF. A pseudonym, Ruth, was given to her by the researcher in order to protect her identity. Ruth met all criteria.

**Study Site**

Research was conducted at two sites for the convenience and comfort of the participant. The initial interview with photo session was conducted in the participant’s apartment at the ILF. Follow up interviews and a second photo session took place in the ILF’s arts and crafts room, which was located a few hundred yards from the participant’s home. These locations were optimal for research as they allowed the researcher to study the participant within her natural environment. This element of the research process was vital since observing the participant in her own natural environment is, according to Kielhofner (2006), an important part of truly understanding the story of that individual, and adds to the clarity and validity of the study.

**Instrumentation**

The primary instrument for data collection in narrative research is the interview process. Several interview methods are acceptable in narrative research, including face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, internet communication, and group interviews (Kielhofner, 2006). A face-to-face interview method was chosen for this study.

The researcher was aware that through the course of research and involvement with the participant, other valuable instruments for data collection may be introduced. In this study, other forms of data were collected, including a book of memories written by Ruth (referred to in this study with the fictitious name of *Memoirs*) and artifacts (e.g., a painting, several note cards, and a shawl). Forty photos were taken of Ruth’s artwork, and of her under observation as well, while engaged in watercolor painting.
The researcher is an important instrument in data collection. Excellent interviewing skills were crucial in order to elicit the necessary data from the participant. Prior to the initial interview, the researcher participated in interview training with an experienced researcher, Cynthia Grapczynski, Ed.D., OTR. The training consisted of instruction in the following: writing effective questions; using an appropriate tone of voice during an interview; learning how to probe beyond the participant's initial responses; monitoring interpersonal behavior; finding a personal style; and achieving objectivity. Follow-up questioning, timing, and patience were also stressed. A list of questions was developed by the researcher following training. The questions used during the initial interview with Ruth may be found in Appendix B.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability in narrative research differs from traditional quantitative research methods. Narrative research is concerned with understanding a human experience, and therefore is not subject to the same quantitative validation and reliability standards. Terminology that better defines validity in narrative research includes "trustworthiness", "credibility", and "objectivity" (Creswell, 2007). Issues of validity and reliability in narrative research are best addressed through the use of techniques such as triangulation, researcher self-examination, interviewer training, use of photography, and artifacts, and participant feedback. These methods were used in the current study.

Triangulation refers to a process of increasing trustworthiness in data collection and analysis. In triangulation, two or more sources of data collection and/or data analyzing are utilized in order to demonstrate parallel truthfulness (Kielhofner, 2006). Peer debriefing is described by Kielhofner (2006) as the use of more than one analyst to
survey the data collected and to review the researcher's process of interpretation. Peer debriefing in the form of consultation with one research committee member served as a means of data analysis.

In order to further strengthen trustworthiness of the data, the researcher engaged in a process of self-evaluation following each session with the subject. This was accomplished through the use of a personal journal. Writing the journal provided an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on personal impressions, assumptions, and conclusions based on each session with the subject. An attempt was made by the researcher to refrain from over personalizing interpretations of the data. However, part of the uniqueness of narrative research is the involvement of the researcher's perspectives and interpretations into the study. On this issue, Creswell goes so far as to say that a narrative inevitably combines the lives of both the participant and the researcher (Creswell, 2003).

Original artifacts were obtained from the subject as an additional source of data verification. These artifacts greatly contributed to the interpretation of data. Ruth has painted literally hundreds of pictures in the past 10 years, since moving into the ILF; therefore, the sheer number of these artifacts greatly contributed to the interpretation of data.

The fourth, and the most critical, tool employed as a means of validity and reliability was participant feedback. Following data collection from the initial interview, as well as the compilation of the data into findings and interpretations, the researcher returned to Ruth with the initial analysis. This analysis consisted of the production of a chronological timeline of Ruth’s history (See Appendix C), the development of five life
stages, as well as 14 pages of interpretive results. The results contained the researcher’s compilation and impression of Ruth’s lifetime of engagement in arts and crafts, the meaningfulness of those activities to her, and a chronological re-telling of her life history. Ruth was given one full week to review and make notes on the timeline and the 14 pages of results. The document was carefully reviewed during a 45 minute session with Ruth and the researcher. Corrections were made accordingly. This process is referred to as “stakeholder checks” by Kielhofner (2006, p. 253). Kielhofner further reports that stakeholder checks not only insure the accuracy of the research data, but also may encourage the participant to contribute increasingly reflective data for the study. The researcher found this to be true and in fact reflected upon this entire process in her personal journal:

Ruth opened up today and shared many more details about her life with me. For example, we worked on a timeline that I had developed. I requested that she look it over and put in the correct dates for certain events in her life. This led to several interesting stories about her life. I began to understand Ruth more as a real person today, not just a subject for my research. I am even more convinced than ever that she is a remarkable and talented woman (journal entry, October 26, 2007).

Procedures

An interview was set up with Ruth in her apartment at the ILF. The research purpose and process, including tape recording the sessions, was explained to Ruth. A consent form was reviewed and signed by Ruth and she indicated that she understood the potential risks and benefits.
A semi-structured interview was utilized for this study. Open-ended questions were posed to the participant. The primary purpose of the interview questions was to elicit Ruth’s stories regarding her craft, its meaning in her life, and how her craft is viewed as a productive occupation. The audio recording was transcribed by the researcher. The process of transcribing the interview, and follow-up sessions, gave the researcher the opportunity to become saturated with the data. Additionally, the transcript provided a convenient written record for use during the data analysis process. The transcripts were electronically filed.

Minimal field notes were also written by the researcher for the purpose of recording observations during the interview. These observations included the context in which Ruth lives and engages in art, Ruth’s mannerisms, etc. The field notes were transcribed and electronically filed.

Photos were taken during the initial interview and a follow up session. These were primarily photos of Ruth’s home, her sewing/craft area, and her quilts.

Data Analysis

Several copies of the transcript were made to assist in data organization. Organizing the data began with the researcher reading the transcripts three times from beginning to end. Notes were written in the margins of the transcripts as the researcher uncovered chronologies, and as themes emerged. Ruth’s stories were not told in chronological order since her objective was to answer the interview questions. Therefore, the researcher sought to establish a chronological order from the transcripts.

The researcher engaged in personal reflection, drawing out meanings and interpreting the data in light of Ruth’s experiences. Consistent with Creswell’s
description of this process, the researcher began to reconstruct, or retell, Ruth’s story in a narrative format (Creswell, 2007).

At this point in the analysis, Creswell refers to a process of reflexivity in which the researcher “brings himself or herself into the study” (2007). This was certainly true for the researcher in the current study. Considerable time was spent in reflection and this was a rich and rewarding experience for the researcher. Further discussion on this will follow in Chapter Five.

After spending considerable time in data analysis, the researcher realized that Ruth’s life, and engagement in arts, fell neatly into several life stages. As these life stages emerged, so did the meaning of art during each stage. Consequently, results from research were structured around five life stages and the practice and meaning of art in each stage, with particular focus on Ruth’s current life stage as a retired middle-old adult living in an ILF. Both the researcher and Ruth worked cooperatively to arrive at an insightful narrative retelling the stages of Ruth’s life, her participation in arts and crafts throughout her lifespan, and the value and meaning of her engagement in the arts.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS/DATA ANALYSIS

Techniques of Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the meaningfulness of engagement in arts and crafts in a middle-old adult who resides in an independent living facility (ILF). A narrative format that involved collecting stories from the participant about her engagement in arts and crafts was used. Data was collected from various sources: an initial semi-structured interview; four follow-up sessions, including two photo sessions; the subject's book of memories (referred to as "Memoirs" in chapters 4 and 5); the researcher's field notes and personal journal; and an examination of artifacts.

The analysis of data in narrative research differs from other qualitative research methods. Rather than developing themes from the data, the researcher seeks to uncover a story that needs to be told, the "unfolding of events, and turning points or epiphanies" (Creswell, 2007). Creswell makes a distinction between types of narrative analysis: "paradigm thinking to create descriptions of themes that hold across stories" and "narrative analysis, in which researchers collect descriptions of events or happenings and then configure them into a story using a plot line" (Creswell, 2007). The current research uses the latter approach. This approach is also referred to by Creswell as a "life history", further described as a "narrative study of an individual's personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations, or communal folklore" (Creswell, 2007). The goal of analysis is to retell the subject's story in a chronological order (Creswell, 2007).
Analysis in a narrative study is complex and involves a series of steps (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The steps used for analysis in the current study included:

1. Examination of, and saturation in, the data: transcription of the initial interview and follow up sessions; three thorough readings of the transcripts in order to saturate the researcher’s mind with the subject’s responses, thorough reading of the subject’s Memoirs; review of field notes and the researcher’s journal; and examination of photos and collected artifacts.

2. Creation of a timeline: The researcher drafted a timeline based on the stories, events and epiphanies that emerged from the transcripts. At the researcher’s request, the subject reviewed and corrected the timeline. (See Appendix

3. Development of life stages: The researcher developed five distinct life stages from the data as they emerged from the timeline, transcripts, and the Memoirs. The five stages reflected major and minor epiphanies in the life of the subject. Each life stage was examined carefully to draw out the meaning of the subject’s art activities during that period in her life.

4. Solicitation of participant feedback: The subject reviewed a document describing the five life stages and she confirmed the veracity of its contents. She added to the analysis process by writing comments in the margins of this document (See appendix D).

5. Retelling of the subject’s story: The researcher retold the subject’s history of participation in the arts in a narrative, placing events within chronological order. This narrative was naturally fell into five sections, each reflecting a life stage.
6. Further solicitation of participant feedback: The subject's validation of the analysis was obtained on two further occasions. A document retelling her life story, with focus on her participation in the arts at each life stage, was reviewed and validated by the subject during these two sessions. Collaboration between the researcher and the subject was critical in this narrative study. In a sense, this feedback was present from beginning to end.

7. Reflection: The researcher engaged in reflexivity throughout the analysis. Creswell describes reflexivity as the inevitable inclusion of the researcher's interests, personal biography, values, and biases into the research process (Creswell, 2003). This is a desirable and focal part of narrative research. Creswell indicates that the more interactive the researcher is with the subject and the analysis process, the better is the quality of the narrative study (Creswell, 2003). Reflexivity was largely a mental and emotional process.

The Subject: Characteristics and Living Arrangements

A pseudonym, "Ruth", has been given to the participant to protect her identity, as well as for convenience during data collection, transcription, and reporting of results. Ruth is a 79 year old, married, Caucasian woman who resides in a local independent living facility (ILF). The ILF provides a continuum of living arrangements from independent living to long-term care. The initial interview, all follow up interviews, and photo sessions took place in Ruth's apartment and in the main building of the ILF. Ruth was warm and friendly during each session and expressed both willingness and interest in the research process. The researcher found Ruth to be a remarkable woman. She is articulate, intelligent, creative, and active in her community. The following comment
from the researcher’s journal illustrates the researcher’s first impressions: “Today I had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing Ruth. Ruth is a delightful, friendly, articulate woman. She is obviously bright and talented (Journal, October 5, 2007). Ruth is clearly respected and loved by her husband, as well as others who look to her for help in their artistic endeavors. For example, a woman who was present in the art room during a photo session remarked to the researcher, “You are interviewing a very nice lady who is very helpful to us when we need help. You know, she is very helpful (personal communication, October 12, 2007).”

Ruth lives in a one-bedroom apartment with her husband, who will be referred to as “Charles”. The apartment is one of four in a small building, located on a quiet street behind the main building of the retirement community. The four apartment owners share a cozy four-season room, as well as a small outdoor garden patch. Ruth’s living quarters were neat and clean, many family photos displayed in frames and on the refrigerator. The researcher noted that there were hymns playing on the television. Ruth informed the

Figure 1. Ruth’s painting, hung in her home.

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researcher that her husband, Charles, was responsible for the ILF’s in-house television channel (field notes, October 5, 2007).

The main building of the ILF is a few hundred feet away from Ruth’s apartment. Ruth and the researcher toured part of this building where she paints. The art room is approximately 15’x40’. Several windows allow for natural lighting. Four craft tables, several easels, corkboards, and various art and craft supplies fill the room. When Ruth and the researcher arrived, two other residents were working on paintings at one of the tables. Eight of Ruth’s paintings are on display in the hallways near the art room. One of her paintings, a stunning depiction of two herons, was purchased by the Arts Council of CRC and is hanging in a large conference room in the main building (field notes, October 12, 2007).

Ruth and her husband have four children, 12 grandchildren, and several great grandchildren. Charles is a retired Methodist minister and the couple spent 40 years in the ministry. They share a colorful history of living in several states in the United States, as well as in Puerto Rico and Zambia. Since moving into the ILF, they continue to be active in ministry activities and serving others within the community. As mentioned earlier, Charles is responsible for the community television station, and he frequently helps other residents with handy-man tasks. Ruth sings in the choir, and volunteers in the Mini-Mart, a small in-house convenience store, and Chatterbox, an in-house ice cream parlor.

Ruth has participated in various craft and art occupations since childhood. Over the course of her life, her art and craft activities have changed, both in form and purpose. These creative activities have included drawing, sewing, oil painting, watercolor painting, pastels, and quilting. The researcher was privileged to be able to see hundreds of Ruth’s
paintings in photo form, as Charles keeps a photo of every painting. The photos fill approximately six or seven albums, which are kept in the couple’s apartment. Additionally, the researcher was able to see several paintings in Ruth’s apartment and in the art room.

The sewing station where Ruth makes her quilts and various other sewing projects is located in her bedroom. Ruth does all of her quilting in her apartment. Her quilts are stored in her bedroom and were shown to the researcher during the first interview session. Photos were taken of these quilts, as well as shawls and other sewing projects. A beautiful floral shawl made by Ruth was purchased by the researcher to be used as an artifact for research purposes and for personal use.

**Life Stages in the Subject’s Artistic Narrative**

The aim of this study was to explore the meaningfulness of arts and crafts in the life of a middle-old adult. During analysis of the data, several stages of Ruth’s life emerged. These stages represented transitions in her life that influenced her involvement in her arts and crafts. Creswell refers to the use of life stages in narrative research as an important means of re-structuring the subject’s life story (Creswell, 2007). He furthers refers to the use of life transitions or “chronological linkages” as a form of data analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 186).

**Childhood Stage (1927-1945)**

Ruth was one of six children and grew up in an extremely poor home. Her memoirs tell of her poverty. The family of eight lived in a one-bedroom house. The mother and father slept in the bedroom while the six children slept “spoon style”, three to a bed, in the front room. Ruth remembers that they paid $10.00 a month to rent this small
home. Ruth’s father was an alcoholic and her mother was often sick with pneumonia.

When Ruth was six years old, the “welfare people” decided that Ruth and her three sisters should be removed from the home because they were “not adequately fed and cared for.” They were sent to live in a “billet” for three months while their mother recuperated from double pneumonia. In the midst of extreme poverty and difficulty, young Ruth developed an interest in art. One of her favorite art activities involved a newspaper paper doll, Tillie the Toiler. Ruth spoke to the researcher about these first artistic interests in the interview. She also mentioned them in her memoirs:

The Sunday Detroit Times, which cost 10 cents (the daily cost 3 cents), had a comic called “Tillie the Toiler”. Each week there was a Tillie paper doll to cut out and with a dress or two. My sisters and I spent many a happy hour playing with Tillie and drawing and coloring new clothes for her. For years I thought I would become a dress designer (Memoirs, p. 2).

As a child, Ruth had an eye for art. In her memoirs, Ruth talks about her memories of her school which had an “art department” and a “large cafeteria, with lovely murals on one wall....” (Memoirs, School Report). Again, quoting from an article she wrote, entitled Treasured Memories, Ruth reflects on her impression of her grandmother’s teaspoons: “To me these spoons were something to covet: something to furtively run my fingers over while marveling at the art-work”.

Art activities were a large part of Ruth’s childhood stage. They held deep meaning for her as a poor young girl growing up in the Depression. She wrote, “My favorite pastime when I was young was drawing and coloring” (Memoirs, Dreams). Not only did art hold meaning as a way to pass time, but her dreams and desires flowed from
them: "Growing up in the Depression, with three older sisters meant I almost never had a new dress. I dreamed about making beautiful things. I thought that being a dress designer would be heavenly" (Memoirs, Dreams). She also learned to sew as a child at 4-H, and "sewing brought [her] great satisfaction." She "took every art course offered" (Memoirs, Dreams).

Young Wife and Mother Stage (1945-1973)

Ruth married at 17 years old, one month before graduating from high school. Eleven months later she gave birth to their first child. Within the next three years three more children were born to Ruth and Charles. During these years her engagement in art activities transitioned away from the carefree days of drawing, to more productive forms of art. These included the designing and making of clothing for her children and herself, as well as crafts projects she did with her children around the kitchen table. When asked if she continued her drawing, Ruth responded, "I don't think I drew much after I was married" (personal communication, October 5, 2007). The meaning of art for Ruth during this period was significantly less for pleasure and more utilitarian. Ruth indicated that she had little time for art as a form of leisure, stating that there "just was no time" (personal communication, October 26, 2007).

Minister's Wife/Employment/Travel Stage (1952-1987)

Ruth's role as a pastor's wife, and this stage of her life, overlapped with the motherhood stage. It nonetheless deserves to be viewed separately as it encompassed nearly 40 years of her life. Part of this stage involved the raising of the couple's four children, but their life in the ministry carried on long after the children were grown. During this stage, Ruth's husband served in several churches in the United States. Ruth
was also employed for eight years assisting the Friend of the Court. After the children left home, Charles returned to school and earned two Master’s degrees in Library Science and Visual Education. Charles’ education and new skills resulted in the couple moving for a three-year post (1973-1976) to Kitwe, Zambia. Ruth and Charles celebrated their 28th wedding anniversary en route to Africa. Ruth turned 50 shortly after their return to the United States. Back home in the U.S., the couple took several ministerial posts, and cared for aging parents.

Ruth’s participation in art during this 40-year stage took several forms. In the earlier years, Sunday School projects involving arts and crafts became one of her responsibilities. The researcher questioned, “Were there any other arts and crafts that you did at that point in your life -- referring to the time when the children were growing up?” Ruth responded, “Not really. If you teach a Sunday School class you’re always doing something. But, for myself, no. I don’t think that I did anything privately. I can’t remember that I did. I sewed a lot.”

In later years, as the children grew and left home, Ruth began to pursue art in more pleasurable forms. In her forties, she took an oil painting class. She pursued this for three years, but did not enjoy it. Consequently, she gave up oil painting, leaving all her oil paints, canvases, brushes and easels in Zambia in 1976. She stated,

Everybody encouraged me to take it [oil painting] to Zambia and paint while I was there. Well, I didn’t pick up my brush, so I left it all there with the art teacher. . . . I didn’t paint again until I came here [referring to the ILF]. . . . I did not want anything to do with oil painting again! I was too anxious, or something. . . . Oils seemed to be real tense for me (personal communication, October 5, 2007).
In her memoirs, Ruth also makes mention of her challenge with oil painting and comically testifies: “[Oil] painting was like going into a foreign country and not knowing the language. It was very stressful. It literally gave me a pain in the neck” (Memoirs, *Encouragement*).

The meaning of engagement in art activities to Ruth during this 40-year stage appeared to be utilitarian, with the exception of an unfulfilling attempt at oil painting. Ruth’s life was busy. Sewing was again an artistic occupation; however, it still was primarily engaged in out of need to produce something, not for leisure or pleasure.

**Partial Retirement Stage (1980-1987)**

In 1980, Charles and Ruth entered a stage of partial retirement from active ministry. Early in this stage, the couple served part-time in Michigan churches. In 1983, Ruth pursued a dream: owning her own home, suitable for a bed and breakfast. After spending years living in parsonages around the United States, Charles and Ruth were thrilled to purchase a beautiful, century-old house in a small town in rural Michigan. For three years Ruth ran this business entirely on her own and she “enjoyed the house and business thoroughly” (Memoirs, *As I Remember It*). She was so in love with this house and its architectural beauty that she said in her memoirs, “I thought I’d died and gone to Heaven” (Memoirs, *Coincidence? Or God’s Plan?*). Charles and Ruth lived apart during this time so that Charles could complete his ministerial obligations in another part of Michigan. However, in 1986, Ruth’s daughter divorced her husband and moved into the bed and breakfast with her two young children. At age 60, Ruth assumed full time responsibility for two young children while their mother worked. This arrangement did not work well alongside the duties of the business, and so, in 1986, the bed and breakfast
was sold. Over the following years, Ruth helped her daughter “get back on her feet.”

Even though Ruth had given up her beautiful dream home, she described these years with the grandchildren as “wonderful years” (Memoirs, *The Ties That Bind*).

Ruth’s participation in artistic occupations took a turn during the partial retirement stage. This part of her life represented a minor epiphany in her artistic history. She made her first quilt. She also reported that her bed and breakfast business was a form of art for her. She described this in her written notes validating Chapter 4, stating, “My house was my art” and “[it] fulfilled [my] need for putting things so colors go together” (participant feedback, October 25, 2007). Her memoirs reflect her attraction to the artistic beauty of the old home:

> The front door was massive, and carved. It had an etched, beveled, plate glass window. I could hardly wait to open it and see what was inside. We walked into an entrance hall and saw a beautiful black marble fireplace. The living room had a fireplace to match. The floors were polished hardwood, set in beautiful patterns. There were three sets of pocket doors with lovely designs on their brass hardware (Memoirs, *Coincidence? Or God’s Plan?*)

The meaning of artistic occupations to Ruth during this stage also rounded a new corner. Now, for the first time since her pleasurable experiences with drawing in childhood, Ruth began to enjoy art for herself. Art remained functional and practical, as seen in the artistic elements of the bed and breakfast and the quilt; however, she appeared to enjoy these art forms more than in previous stages. She expresses it thus in her memoirs: “[I have tried] to fulfill my love of color . . . when I quilt” (Memoirs, *What’s in
Full Retirement Stage (1989-present)

Ruth and Charles reached full retirement in 1989 when Ruth was 62 years old. However, she and her husband continued to be active in volunteer activities and in helping their daughter. In 1989, Charles went to Bolivia for 15 days, and in 1995, both Ruth and Charles spent a year in Puerto Rico. It was during this phase of full retirement that Ruth and her husband moved into the ILF, where they currently reside. Earlier in this chapter, the researcher discussed the details of their retirement home and community. To reiterate, Ruth’s home is a small four-room home consisting of a bedroom, living room, bathroom, and eat-in kitchen.

At the time of the current study, in this stage of Ruth’s life, her engagement in art has fully bloomed. After decades of devoting her life to her husband’s ministry and her children, and of serving people around the globe, Ruth finally has reached a point in her life when she has time to fully enjoy her love of art. Ruth’s art activities since moving
into the ILF have varied widely. Some of these have included watercolor painting, quilting, painting on clothing, card making, sewing, and bead making. The two artistic occupations that she engages in most frequently are watercolor painting and quilting. She continues to sew as well, and has designed a simple and unique shawl, which she intends to sell at the annual ILF's art fair. When asked about her schedule and frequency of involvement in painting, Ruth replied, "I paint one morning a week. We have a class. I say a class, but we have no instructor, but it's a group that gets together every Thursday morning" (personal communication, October 5, 2007). The quilting materials and sewing machine are located in Ruth's apartment and she does quilting in her "spare time; when [she] has a few minutes". In the past 10 years she has completed seven or eight quilts, one of which is on the bed in the couple's bedroom.

Retirement and moving into the ILF has represented a sort of minor epiphany in Ruth's life with regard to the meaningfulness of art. She no longer engages in artistic activities primarily for practical or utilitarian purposes, but for her own personal enjoyment, to fill leisure time, as means of social involvement, and for the satisfaction of public response. Each of these four areas will be further explored and interpreted in chapter 5.

Summary

Data from the current research was carefully analyzed. Five life stages emerged from the various data sources. These five stages were distinct from one another in terms of Ruth's life history, her engagements in arts and crafts, and the meaning of those engagements. The meaningfulness of creative occupations to Ruth was slightly different
throughout each stage, with the greatest turning point occurring when she moved in the ILF.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This narrative study was conducted in order to explore the meaningfulness of engagement in arts and crafts to a middle-old adult who resides in an independent living facility. Productivity through arts and crafts was also explored. Consistent with a narrative approach, stories of engagement in the arts were elicited from the participant and retold by the researcher (see Chapter 4). The following chapter will include a synthesis of the researcher’s conclusions presented in a narrative format, applications to occupational therapy practice, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

Use of Voice

A word of explanation regarding the use of voice is in order at this point in the study. As the researcher, I devoted more than 30 hours to reading literature on narrative research. Based on the literature, I have chosen to write this final chapter in the first person and to include discussions about my own intimate involvement in the research process. This writing method is supported, and widely encouraged, by experienced narrative researchers.

I found Creswell to be the most helpful on this topic. Creswell encourages narrative writers to experiment with form, including their own reflexivity in the writings (Creswell, 2007). He also discusses the use of the researcher’s tacit knowledge and intuition as central to narrative research. This knowledge is best expressed through the
researcher’s use of “I” in recording findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2003). Clandinin and Connelly suggest that the very nature of the narrative process prevents it from being cold and impersonal, with texts taking a written form “in which the researcher is ‘the researcher’ and not ‘I’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 149). Rather, they suggest that as the participant’s stories are retold by the researcher, the researcher’s place and voice become central (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). This adds to the value and attraction of narrative research, differentiating it from qualitative research and highlighting its explorative purpose (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). It became clear to me as I began to write chapters four and five of this study that, since I was so closely involved in the narrative research process, I could most effectively convey the findings and interpretations of this research using the first person singular.

**Discussion of Findings**

As I begin to write this chapter, I am uncomfortable with the term “findings” as it relates to Ruth’s story. The essence of narrative research is not to “find” but to “explore”. Findings imply specific answers to specific questions or problems. A narrative study, however, tells a story of an individual and looks for the meaning and understanding of an individual. In attempting to comply with typical research structure, I feel somewhat like I am trying to squeeze a square peg into a round hole. While I recognize the need to conform to standards of quality research, I also need to be faithful to the purpose of narrative studies. In chapter 4 of this study, I retold Ruth’s story through a focus on five life stages. I have decided, after considerable reflection, to make the first section of Chapter 5 a synthesis of my reflections and interpretations that have evolved throughout my personal interactions with Ruth (Wicks & Whiteford, 2003). I have created two
major categories that reflect the two main purposes of this study: meaningfulness and productivity.

Discussion of Meaningfulness

Childhood to Partial Retirement Stages

As demonstrated in the retelling of Ruth's story in Chapter 4, some form of art has consistently been present in each stage of her life. The meaningfulness, however, of her participation in art changed significantly across her lifespan. It seemed to me, as I listened to Ruth's stories, that art has always been important, but that art's expression of necessity conformed to the particular demands placed upon her.

In her childhood, art was purely a pleasurable experience, but it was also at the center of her aspirations. Her love of drawing dress patterns for Tillie the Toiler paper dolls seemed to give her a dream, a fantasy of escape from poverty, of becoming a dress designer. These themes of escape, financial security, and artistic satisfaction through drawing, coloring, and dress designing, came up repeatedly in our conversations and in her Memoirs, indicating to me that art held significant meaning for her in terms of her future, an impression that still remains strong today, as evidenced in one especially poignant entry of her Memoirs. The entry begins with an account of her childhood fascination with Tillie the Toiler. She goes on to talk about how "sewing brought [her] great satisfaction." She references her poverty by stating that she and her sisters almost never had a new dress. She writes, "I loved beautiful things and since we had no money, I dreamed about making beautiful things. I thought that being a dress designer would be heavenly" (Memoirs, Dreams).
The next three stages of Ruth’s life, beginning with her marriage at age 17 to
Charles and up until her move in the ILF, were marked by a shift in both the pursuit and
meaning of art for Ruth. Noted psychologist and author on lifespan development, Helen
L. Bee, suggests that the most stressful stage of adult life is between the ages of 18 and
25. This stage is marked by separation from parents and home, redefining of roles (i.e., as
spouse), role demands (i.e., parenthood), and the creation of a new life pattern (Lee,
1992). For Ruth, this was a time marked by change. Compounding the adjustment to
married life was the poverty of the Depression and Ruth’s new husband being drafted
into the army to fight in World War II. Their first child was born eleven months after
their marriage. It could be said that life came at Ruth fast, leaving her little time for her
love of art.

Over the following adult years until the age of 60, Ruth’s engagement in art was
almost entirely for productive purposes. Her sewing skills were put to good use in
making clothing for her family but Ruth acknowledges that engagement in art as a leisure
activity was put on hold during these three stages. It was only for a brief period that she
enrolled in and pursued oil painting. This occurred in her 40’s, after the children had
grown. She did not enjoy this, but it appears to me that this was an attempt on her part to
reconnect with her love of art. As she progressed in her development to middle
adulthood, art became new again. I reflected on this in my journal with regard to her short
time in the bed and breakfast:

I also talked to her a little about a thought I had when reading through her
Memoirs. It dawned on me that, though she had not directly said this, her years
in the bed and breakfast were an art form. It was my thinking that part of the
reason this was so meaningful to her was that she had the opportunity to be artistic and resurrect some of her love of creating. Perhaps this period of time was a sort of transition for her. The bed and breakfast allowed her to continue serving others but also enjoy her love of creativity. A sort of combining and transitioning all in one. It was amazing to me that, as we reviewed this concept, she had written nearly the same thing in her notes validating my findings. I felt this was a confirmation that my interpretations of her story were trustworthy. This was a great encouragement (researcher's journal, November 1, 2007. See Appendix D).

The reference made in this quote to her notes were handwritten comments she had added to the data I had given her the week before. She wrote, “Loved the house – Meaningful activity during retirement – Still caring for people – Entertaining folks in a lovely home – Making breakfast beautiful to look at and good to eat.”

Of course, Ruth sacrificed her beautiful home, with all its meaning and satisfaction, to care for her daughter and grandchildren. This apparent reverse in the natural progression of adulthood development did not faze Ruth. I was struck with the fact that the meaningfulness of art in her life did not supersede her values as a mother and grandmother. This is supported by her reminiscence of her days caring for her grandchildren:

We lived together for five wonderful years. We read stories, we played together, we napped together, we learned together. Billy and I walked Kelly [fictitious names] to her kindergarten class every day – and three hours later went to walk her home. It was only a few blocks and we never tired of it…There is nothing more important in this world than family (Memoirs, *The Tie that Binds*).
Another of Ruth’s writings confirmed my interpretation of the meaningfulness of art in Ruth’s life, and of its displacement at the same time, for values of greater meaning. In the section of the Memoir entitled *Changes*, Ruth describes her excitement over a new sewing room Charles had built for her: “Oh, what a pleasure to just stand and admire the shelves and large table Charles built for me in my very own sewing room. I love to sew and had never had a room for just that purpose”. Ironically, just as the room was finished, she received a call from her sister who needed a place to stay for an indefinite period of time. Ruth wrote, “That’s how my sewing room turned into a very adequate bedroom for my sister before I ever got a piece of fabric placed on a shelf. Gen lived with us for five years. I love to sew, but I love my sister more. I enjoyed her company immensely. . .” (Memoirs, *Changes*). Ruth appears to have suspended the need for art as a purely pleasurable occupation in favor of higher values.

In summary of Ruth’s pre-retirement adult years, I see the evolution of two congruous aspects in her life. On one side, the meaningfulness of her engagement in art and creativity channeled into practical and benevolent pursuits; and congruently, the primacy of family, with its even greater meaningfulness, taking first place over her artistic dreams. As I began to come to these conclusions, I became increasingly impressed with Ruth as a woman of character. Her Memoirs, in particular, were strikingly revealing of her character, like little windows into her heart. It thrilled me to read these, especially the references to art and family. I recorded in my journal on October 26, 2007:

I have just spent 2 hours reading through this book (the Memoirs), and I find myself almost speechless at its simplicity, beauty, and wisdom. At times I felt that I was reading something nearly sacred because of her
transparency and honesty with the events of her life (i.e., *Memories of Father*, her father having been an alcoholic). The more I read of Ruth’s memoirs, the more deeply convinced I became of the privilege of doing research with her.

The painting below seems to me to be a unique joining of Ruth’s painting and her philosophies about the importance of family. Ruth described it to me as an abstract depiction of the union between a man and woman in marriage, as the two individuals become one. It is one of my favorites among Ruth’s paintings, partly because it is a self-expression of her values, a self-portrait of her beliefs about marriage and family.

*Figure 3. Ruth’s painting entitled, “And the Two Shall Become One”*

**Retirement Stage (Current Stage)**

In Ruth’s retirement years, the meaningfulness of engagement in art has changed enormously. As I attempt to draw out the meaningfulness of art in Ruth’s retirement years, I am cognizant of this transition as another epiphany in her adulthood. Lee asserts that retirement is often accompanied by drastic role changes, particularly the loss of the worker role. For some individuals the effects of retirement are detrimental and include a reduction of income, reduction in physical activity resulting in loss of health, and
depression or other mental health issues (Lee, 1992). However, Lee also states that for most adults, retirement is a time of increased life satisfaction, pursuit of leisure occupations and hobbies, and deepening of relationships (Lee, 1992). In the literature review found in Chapter 2 of the current research, an Australian study of the occupational interests of 86 year olds was reviewed. Researchers found that the most valued occupations of the study group were media interests such as radio and TV, and leisure pursuits such as arts and crafts and gardening (Haggblom-Kronlof and Sonn, 2005).

Moving into an ILF has allowed Ruth to fully expand and enjoy her love of arts and crafts. Engagement in the arts of watercolor painting and quilting hold meaning for Ruth in primarily four ways: art gives her a deep sense of pleasure and enjoyment; art fills leisure time; art provides her with social involvement in her community; and the admiration of her artwork by others gives her a sense of pride and satisfaction.

Meaningfulness – Personal Enjoyment:

The transition into retirement meant that art could become a major focus of Ruth’s life, engaged in for her own personal enjoyment. I posed the following key question to Ruth: “Please complete this sentence: The thing that I find most meaningful about painting and quilting is ________.” Her immediate response was, “It’s enjoyable. That’s it.” (personal communication, October 5, 2007). Certainly, for Ruth, retirement brought with it a sort of rebirth of her love of arts and crafts. I almost see this stage in her life as parallel to her childhood stage in terms of crafting enjoyment. Numerous descriptive words and phrases which illustrate her pleasure in art are found throughout the transcripts:

• “I enjoyed it thoroughly, and I still do”
"Quilting is a lot of work, although I enjoy that thoroughly, too."

"I love piecing, cutting up and sewing back together."

"I enjoyed being in the class..."

"...so enjoy it. And if I didn’t enjoy it, I wouldn’t do it."

"I do it for my own enjoyment, both the quilting and the painting."

"I just do it for me because I enjoy it"

"...its good because I enjoy it."

"Yes, I end up with something beautiful, which makes me happy too."

"It’s entirely for fun, because I enjoy it."

"It’s enjoyable to be over there [in the art room]."

"It’s enjoyable. That’s it."

"I do encourage people to take our class because its fun..."

"Oh, I just love to do this...I can hardly wait to get them sewn together to see what it looks like."

The unmistakable conclusion from these quotes is that meaningfulness of art engagement for Ruth at this stage in her life is derived from the pleasure it gives her. A rather endearing trait of Ruth’s during our sessions together was to hum while showing me her quilts and paintings. In my field notes from two separate visits (October 5 and October 12), I wrote, “Ruth hums off and on during the interview, particularly when she is showing me her quilts” and “Ruth hums off and on as she shows me her paintings” (field notes, Appendix E). The pleasure that her painting and quilting give Ruth is obvious.
Meaningfulness – Purposeful Leisure Time:

Before moving into the ILF and embarking on the new retirement stage, Ruth recognized the need to fill her hours with meaningful occupations. She spoke of this in her memoirs when she was 70 years old and on the verge of moving into the ILF. Moving into a small apartment required sorting through years of accumulated possessions, and keeping only those things that were most meaningful. I interpret the following statement as an encapsulation of the tremendous meaning and importance of art as a leisure activity in her life as an older adult:

When you’re 70 and your family is not taking up your time, we sit and think, ‘Well, what does take up my time? What do we do all day?’ For me, it was doing various crafts and sewing. What do I need for that? My dining room table. I cut fabric on it, sit at it to paint, paste, write. . . . We must take the table. If I’m going to be happy, I must also have my sewing machine. Nothing gives me quite the pleasure I get from cutting up fabric and sewing it back together again. It’s something I can do by myself and have great fun doing it. The sewing machine goes (Memoirs, Yes, I’ll Keep That).

In the initial interview, Ruth indicated that quilting satisfies a need in her life to fill empty hours: “The quilting, which I do in my spare time at home, might mean that I have a lot of time by myself that I need to fill. . . . So, quilting does fill leisure time. But, it’s good because I enjoy it” (personal communication, October 5, 2007).

Meaningfulness – Social Involvement:

As I reviewed the transcripts from my conversations with Ruth, it became clear that another minor theme was emerging. Ruth spoke several times about her husband’s
busy life and, although she did not appear to resent it, she did acknowledge that it left her with many empty hours to fill. She admitted, “My husband is a very busy man. We don’t do very many things together... We just do our own things” (personal communication, October 5, 2007). With many hours to fill in her husband’s absence, art becomes an avenue for her to seek out social activities. Ruth identifies her engagement in arts and crafts as a means of socialization. “The painting... I like to do it with other people. It’s enjoyable to be over there and we critique one another and pat one another on the back” (personal communication, October 5, 2007). The researcher observed this socialization taking place when visiting the art room on two separate occasions. On one occasion, Ruth’s sister was there and she and Ruth were painting together at a table. I had occasion to visit her at the ILF’s craft bizarre, and I noted that the room was filled with other residents from the ILF. I see this occasion as yet another source of socialization through the medium of art.

Meaningfulness – Public Response

An additional area of meaning for Ruth in creating works of art is the response of others to her work. I asked Ruth, “Are there other aspects [of painting] that make it meaningful?” She replied, “Well, it’s nice that other people will say, ‘That’s beautiful, Ruth... But, it’s not necessary that they do that...I just do it for me because I enjoy it. But other people enjoy it too, and that’s nice too, adds the fullness.” On another occasion she related a story about a gentleman who visited her from another part of the state. During the visit he admired one of her paintings that reminded him of his childhood. Apparently this gentleman had already begun driving home and, because he liked the painting so much, turned around and came back to purchase the painting from Ruth. As
she was relating this story to me, it was clear that she found this very satisfying and fulfilling. Perhaps the most obvious reference Ruth made to her satisfaction with the responses of others was when she offered to show me her quilts. She laughingly whispered, “I love to show off my stuff.”

As mentioned earlier, one of Ruth’s paintings received public recognition by the art council at her retirement village. That painting, which depicts two herons, is featured below:

![Figure 4. Painting selected by art council for public display.](image)

Discussion of Productivity

One of my initial intentions in this study was to explore the area of productivity as it relates to arts and crafts in the middle-old adult. I have chosen to focus on Ruth’s current life stage as it relates to productivity. Her previous life stages have been thoroughly analyzed in previous sections, and conclusions drawn.

I broached the subject of productivity as a current purpose for engagement in art in Ruth’s retirement years during our initial interview. This was met with a startled
response from Ruth. She replied, "For OLD PEOPLE? What for?" Not willing to drop the topic, I pressed her by asking Ruth to define productivity. After thinking for nearly a minute, she responded, "Producing something that somebody else enjoys or wants, or something. I don't know. Having a product . . . I don't know." I posed a follow up question: "So then, would you think of your artwork as productivity?" Again she responded, "No, not for me. It's entirely for fun, because I enjoy it" (personal communication, October 5, 2007). Ironically, her definition perfectly described what I would have considered one of the main purposes for her engagement in art, namely, producing something that someone (including herself) would enjoy. Nonetheless, in Ruth's thinking, productivity conjured up an image of some sort of work. To her, her retirement stage of life did not involve the need for work, but for enjoyment.

As discussed in my literature review, this narrative study left the door open for the selected participant to define productivity within the context of his or her own experiences. I added that the meaning of productivity for the participant may or may not be linked to other aspects of engagement in art (such as pleasure or enjoyment). I admit that I experienced some frustration at this point, particularly since one of my main objectives in this study was to explore productivity. In my journal I reflected on the frustrations of conducting the study with pre-conceived ideas that go unsupported by the participant:

At one point in the initial interview, I realized that I was tempted to force certain areas of discussion in order to elicit the types of responses I had expected to hear from the subject. This was out of a fear that her responses were not sufficient for my study. I mentally reminded myself that I was not the focus...
of this study, and strangely, even my study was not the focus of the study. The focus was Ruth, and her answers were 100% accurate because they were her truthful answers. I did not need to change them, enhance them, or manipulate them to make them fit my expectations for my research. I did not want to manipulate the situation so that Ruth was a "puppet reciting what the researcher [in this case, me], had previously thought up" (Crzarniawska, 2004, p. 53). This mental realization was freeing. I was able to proceed with the interview with a renewed commitment to deeply understand THIS woman, regardless of my own expectations.

I dropped the discussion of productivity during the initial interview. Later, as I poured over the data and analyzed it, I realized that productivity was indeed present in her words and activities, although not as she would have defined it.

While I believe that Ruth would deemphasize productivity as a purpose for art engagement in retirement, I came to a somewhat different conclusion. From an occupational therapy perspective, productivity includes activities that not only result in a product, but also activities that produce a sense of satisfaction or purposeful use of time. According to Pierce (2003), productivity falls within a subjective dimension of occupation and includes not only work, but also activities that relieve boredom and stress, and provide personal identity. Pierce’s use of the concept of productivity allows for pleasure, appeal, and leisure to be interconnected with work. Zemke & Pierce (1994) suggest that pleasure and a sense of purpose can reach high levels during productivity. A superficial analysis of the data from this research is enough to convince me that productivity is a large part of Ruth’s engagement in the arts. This productivity is
evidenced in her prolific creation of paintings, the hours of leisure time that are filled with creativity, the relief of boredom in her husband's absence, and a sense of personal identity and satisfaction as a gifted artist.

Summary of Findings

I have attempted to draw conclusions about both the meaning and productivity of Ruth's artistic occupations as a middle-old adult. As I reflect on the entire analysis process, I have come to a final conclusion that brings me back to the crux of my beliefs as an occupational therapist. Based on my observations of Ruth and analysis of the data, *purposeful activity* is the primary meaning of art engagement for Ruth across her entire lifespan. I am reminded of the classic writings of Mary Reilly, prominent occupational therapist of the 1960's and 1970's, who believed that engagement in meaningful occupations constitutes one of the basic needs of humans (Kielhofner, 2004). In my literature review, I made reference to Kielhofner's assertion that people choose what they want to do based upon how effective they perceive they are in that occupation, where their values and interests lie, and what is enjoyable to them. Kielhofner also suggests that people are shaped by what they choose and that occupation is a dynamic process, changing due to context, ability, and personal choice (Kielhofner, 2004). The very essence of purposeful activity is embodied in Ruth's narrative of art engagement. In art she finds herself, she has a purpose, she experiences pleasure, she is productivity, and she enjoys social activities as well as solitary leisure. This epitomizes Mary Reilly's famous quote on the meaning of occupation for humans. She eloquently and insightfully stated, "Man, through the use of hands, as they are energized by mind and will, influences the state of his own health" (Reilly, cited in Kielhofner, 2004, p. 58).
From childhood, through the adult stages of life, and now as a middle-old adult in retirement, Ruth has found meaning and purpose in producing works of art. At times these have been created out of necessity, and at other times purely for pleasure or socialization. However, all have been purposeful activities, and have provided Ruth with a sense of identity and purpose. I support this interpretation with a portion of a revealing conversation with Ruth which arose from two of my interview questions. I posed two similar questions:

1. Suppose you were asked to speak to a group of adults around the same age as you, on the topic of your painting. What would you say to them?

2. Suppose you were asked to speak to a group of young people on the topic of developing an interest in art. What would you tell them?

Ruth responded to these questions with the deepest display of emotion I witnessed during our dialogue. She answered, “I think everybody should have a hobby. I don’t care if it’s playing tennis, or writing stories, or whatever, but you must have something that you enjoy doing by yourself.”

My next question to her was simply, “Why?” Her earnest and insightful answer is worthy of quoting in full: (emphasis mine)

So you know yourself . . . so that you do not depend on other people to give you happiness. You have to find the happiness within yourself, something you enjoy. Just do it. And you might have to try 6 different things before you find out what’s really good for you, but everybody should. So many people come here without a hobby, and they’re LOST. If you retire without anything to do, can you IMAGINE how terrible that must be? [Those residents] just bother everyone else.
Or just pout, or gripe, or can’t find anything to do, just like little child. You know, “I have nothing to do, Grandma, or Mama, what can I do now?” And there are a million things that they could be doing but they didn’t know what to do. So, EVERYBODY should find out what is good for them, and DO IT.

I began this research with a list of questions that I used as a compass to guide me through the exploration. I can now say unequivocally that all research questions were answered. Not only were my starting questions answered, but the richness of the data raised, and answered, even deeper questions. It was a thrill to explore Ruth’s life and construct a narrative; to find the research even deeper and fuller than I even imagined from the beginning.

Application to Occupational Therapy Practice

This study has contributed to an understanding of the meaningfulness of engagement in arts and crafts for a middle-old adult across her lifespan. The life explored in this study is an illustration of the how engagement in arts may hold significant meaning for occupational therapy patients. Generalizability to the middle-old adult population cannot be made from this study. However, this deep exploration provides insights that occupational therapists may apply in interventions. This study has demonstrated that each individual client has a history, a narrative, a story of their own that holds deep meaning, all of which influence the occupations they choose.

Occupational therapy has its roots in arts and crafts. Early founders employed arts and crafts as a primary therapy intervention (Schmid, 2004). One of the goals of the researcher in this study was to renew an interest in application of arts and crafts as therapy in the occupational therapy community.
There are a number of advantages to the use of arts and crafts as an intervention technique. One advantage is that the arts cross all age barriers. This is demonstrated in this study. Ruth engaged in various forms of art throughout her lifespan. Another one of the beauties of arts and crafts as intervention is its wide acceptance across cultures. Occupational therapist, Margaret Drake, in her excellent book, *Crafts in Therapy and Rehabilitation* (1992), suggests that interventions with crafts may be universal, as well as unique to specific cultural groups. Thirdly, arts and crafts cross gender borders as well. Enjoyment, a fourth benefit of the application of arts and crafts as a treatment technique for intervention, incorporates purpose, creativity, personalization, and productivity. It produces in the patient a sense of pride, increased self-esteem, accomplishment, and relief from boredom or stress. Additional benefits include opportunities for socialization or income.

Occupational therapy intervention focuses on the whole person, whether treating the older adult, as was the focus of this study, or any other population. Therefore, while the psychosocial benefits listed above are important, the cognitive and physical benefits of arts as intervention are equally important. Depending upon the degree of complexity of a craft intervention, various cognitive, perceptual, and physical goals may be addressed. The following objectives fit well with the arts and crafts interventions: cognitive and intellectual stimulation, including promotion of problem-solving skills through exploration of alternatives, a natural part of the creative process; physical rehabilitation, restoration, or maintenance; sensory stimulation and body awareness; vocational planning and skill development; and development of avocational skills (Lewis, 2003).
The beauty of arts and crafts lies in the flexibility it offers the occupational therapist, who can tailor a craft to meet the very specific needs of a client. A variety of materials, textures, and colors, combined with a variety of techniques, gives the therapist enormous flexibility in tailoring interventions. A specific concern within the older adult population is dementia, especially Alzheimer's. Arts and crafts may be graded to fit the stage of dementia of the older adult. Low vision is a common concern among the elderly, yet it is not necessarily a detriment to engagement in arts and crafts because of the tactile nature of this intervention. A creative therapist can locate materials and projects that enable the client with low vision to actively participate in the arts. Communication and personal expression are of particular benefit for individuals who have lost the ability to express themselves, particularly for individuals with expressive language deficits or severe emotional problems. Furthermore, arts and crafts are effective interventions in mental health treatment (Korlin, Nyback, & Goldberg, 2000) and wellness promotion. The effectiveness of craft interventions in studies of death and dying has proven effective also (see chapter 2, Literature Review).

Drake (1992) provides a further insightful benefit for the use of arts and crafts as therapy intervention. She refers to crafts as a "microcosm of life" (Drake, 1992, p. 4). By this she means that, like life, one is given basic raw materials, and over time prepares and shapes them, and creates. Through guidance and learning, a craft is produced. She suggests, "Crafts are a teaching example of how to put it [life] all together. This concept makes crafts valuable therapeutic media . . . ." (Drake, 1992, p. 4).
Arts and crafts may also be used in a wide variety of settings. Within occupational therapy intervention, the versatility of arts and crafts lends itself well to rehabilitation settings, schools, mental health centers, and hospitals.

Occupational therapists should apply the theories of the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) to the selection of arts as therapy for their clients. This model endorses the importance of client-centered care and the involvement of the client in therapy (Kielhofner, 2004). Arts and crafts lend themselves well to individualized interventions.

Limitations

Narrative research is by nature intended to have a limited scope and is specific in its subject selection. However, such specificity of research limits the scope of generalization, a weakness inherent in the nature of narrative as a study of one individual, for the subject may not be an accurate representation of the larger population of middle-old adults who reside in ILFs. This weakness is inherent in the nature of a narrative as a study of one individual. Additionally, the subject in this study may not be an accurate representation of the larger population of middle-old adults who reside in ILFs.

A second limitation is the subjective nature of the analysis process. As the researcher, I felt a keen sense of duty to be accurate in my representations of the participant and my interpretations of the data. Although I employed principles of triangulation and participant feedback to insure validity, the possibility remains that I may have misrepresented or misinterpreted the data.
Suggestions for Further Research

Further research is needed in the area of meaningfulness of arts and crafts in middle-old adults. Additional narrative studies with older adults who live in a variety of settings and in various parts of the world are encouraged. Individuals who live with physical disabilities, or mental illness, or who suffer from Alzheimer’s would also be beneficial to study.

Other methods of research are encouraged as well. Narrative research is very specific; however, other forms of qualitative research, as well as quantitative research, have broader focuses. These would lend themselves well to generalization with regard to the older adult population. Additional research on the importance of arts and crafts as a meaningful, productive, purposeful activity in older adults is highly encouraged as the United States anticipates an increase in the elderly population as the baby boomers age.

Conclusion/Summary

This narrative study explored the meaningful productivity of arts and crafts in the life of a middle-old adult who resides in an independent living facility. A semi-structured interview method was employed and several sources of data were collected. Data was analyzed and interpreted by the researcher and was reviewed and corrected on two occasions by the participant to insure validity.

Conclusions drawn from this study were both descriptive (a retelling of the participant’s stories) and interpretative (meanings were uncovered). Application was made to the field of occupational therapy.

Occupational therapists need to arm themselves with solid evidenced-based practice as they creatively treat the aging community. This study has demonstrated that
arts and crafts continue to be a relevant and meaningful productive occupation for older adults. Occupational therapy theory and practice has a long history in the arts and crafts. This study has demonstrated the value of returning to our founder’s roots.
References


No. 4. Auckland: Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme, Massey University.


Appendix A

Letter of Request

Research participant needed for study on arts and crafts as a meaningful activity for an older adult.

Dear Resident:

My name is Sara Thornburg and I am working on my Master’s Degree in occupational therapy at Grand Valley State University. I am currently conducting research for my thesis. I am looking for an individual who would be willing to be a research participant. The topic of this research is the importance of arts and crafts in an older adult. Below are some questions that will clarify what the research is about, who may participate, and how much time is involved:

What is the research about?
- The topic of my thesis research is: *An Exploration of Arts and Crafts as Meaningful Productivity in an Older Adult.* If you were my research participant, I would be interested in knowing about the importance that engaging in arts and crafts plays in your life. I would ask you to share stories with me about your life as an artist or crafter. You would be asked to demonstrate how you make your crafted items, and show me some samples of your work.

Who can be involved?
- Male or female
- Between the ages of 75 and 84
- Living in an independent living facility
- Regularly engaging in some form of art or craft

If I am selected, what will I have to do?
- You will be interviewed and asked to share stories about the importance of making crafts in your life
- You will be asked to demonstrate how you make your craft/artwork and be photographed while making a craft/art item
- You will be given the opportunity to show finished art or craft items to the researcher. These items will be photographed.
- You will meet with the researcher at a later date, to discuss research findings (which are based on the interviews and observations)

Where would the interviews take place?
- At your independent living facility (in your living quarters, or another room at the your independent living facility where your privacy can be maintained)
How much time will be involved? Initial interview(s): 1-1½ hours
- Demonstration and photographing: (this depends on the type of craft that you engage in) approximately 1 hour
- Show finished art or craft items: 30 minutes
- Meetings to review and discuss research findings: approximately 2-3 hours
- Total time: approximately 4½ hours, spread out over a 2 month period

When will the research be conducted?
- Initial interview and demonstration of art or craft: September, 2007
- Meeting to review research findings: Sometime between September and November, 2007

Will it cost anything to participate?
- No. There is no cost to you.

Will I be paid to participate?
- No. This is entirely voluntary. However, your participation is highly valued and appreciated.

I am excited about conducting this research. If you think you would be willing to participate in this research project, please contact me by returning the enclosed form in the stamped self-addressed envelope.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Thornburg, OTS

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please fill out this form and mail it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. Thank you!

Participant Form

Name: _________________________________
Age: __________

Name of your independent living facility:
________________________________________

Description of the art or craft in which you participate:
________________________________________

Phone number where you can be reached: _____________________
Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been living in Grand Rapids?
2. How long have you been doing watercolor?
3. When did you start quilting?
4. How did you come to learn how to do watercolor painting?
5. Which of these two arts is your favorite?
6. Do have a particular routine or schedule for your crafting?
7. How often would you say that you do painting?
8. How often would you say you do quilting?
9. Were there any other arts and crafts that you did at various points in your life?
10. Have you ever kept any kind of journals or diaries of your crafting?
11. Have you kept a photographic record or journal?
12. Please tell me about certain items that you have made that have been particularly special to you, or to someone else.
13. Please tell me what you consider to be a couple of the most satisfying things for you in terms of crafting.
14. What would you say are negative things about painting or any of the craft work that you’ve done, if there any?
15. What makes (your engagement in art) the most meaningful to you?
16. Do others ask you to do (paintings) for them, or do they wait to see what you produce and then they want it after they see it?

17. Are there ways in which that you believe that being involved in this artwork has influenced how you feel about yourself?

18. Can you think of a time when your involvement in your craft enabled you to better cope with stresses or difficulties?

19. In what ways does crafting fill a need in your life? (For example, maybe a need for enjoyment, or leisure, creativity, or maybe practical reasons, money reasons, maybe you sell your craft....).

20. In what ways have your perceptions about the importance of doing your paintings...changed over the years, if at all?

21. Do you perceive that your skills have changed since you first began, either for the better, or declining in any way at all?

22. Would you think of your artwork as productivity?

23. Which of these two statements would you say best describes your feelings about (creating) art:
   a. I must make or produce as many items as I can.
   b. I want to enjoy making this item and it does not matter how long it takes.

24. How many paintings and quilts do you think you have made?

25. In what ways, if any, do you feel that family or friends have expectations for you (in terms of producing artwork)?

26. Have you taught quilting or painting?
27. Do you sell your crafted items?

28. Would you describe the time that you spend in making art as a means of increasing your social involvement with other people, or is it more a time to be alone or do something by yourself that you enjoy, or both?

29. The thing that I find most meaningful about painting and quilting is _________.

30. On a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being of no importance at all and 10 being the most important thing in my life, how important is it to you to be able to continue doing these crafts?

31. Suppose that you were asked to speak to a group of adults around the same age as you on the topic of your (involvement in) painting. What would you say to them?

32. Suppose that you were asked to speak to a group of young people on the topic of developing an interest in art, what would tell them?
Life Stages Timeline

Childhood Stage
(Overlapping stages)
Partial Retirement Stage: Bed & Breakfast

1927 - 1945
1945 - 1973
1952 - 1987
1980 - 1987
1989 - present

Marriage and young motherhood
Minister's Wife/Employment/Travel Stage
Full Retirement Stage: Move to ILF
Appendix D
Researcher’s Journal

October 1, 2007:

I am really looking forward to meeting my research participant, “Ruth”, on Friday! She is a water color painter and also a quilter. What excites me most is simply hearing her stories about her artwork. I wonder if there are times when she remembers her artwork being especially enjoyable, or important to others, or helpful in getting her through difficulties. I wonder if she likes her artwork, or if she is critical of it, if she is perfectionist, or just enjoys the process. So many things to find out....

At this point, I have no idea how long Ruth has been engaging in these activities...could be just since retirement, or her whole life. I think about how my own love of crafting began when I was a young girl and continues to this day. There is something that excites me when I think about making something; even the smallest act of creating can fill me with happiness! I wonder if she feels that way too.

I am excited about see her artwork. Is her style contemporary? or traditional? Does she like landscapes, portraits, abstracts? Is her quilting for utilitarian purposes or largely aesthetic? I hope to be able to purchase something from her as a memento of my years in grad school...seems fitting and appropriate, doesn’t it?

I have written a letter to Ruth to thank her for her willingness to be involved in my research. I told her a little bit about myself so that I would not seem like a total
stranger when I get there. I believe Ruth lives with her husband, who also is a crafter. They could prove to be a very interesting couple. I probably won’t want to leave their apartment.

Friday, October 5, 2007

Today I had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing Ruth. Ruth is a delightful, friendly, articulate woman. She is obviously bright and talented. Ruth invited me into her small apartment, which she shares with her husband of 62 years. I will call him “Charles”. I did not meet Charles today. Ruth indicated that he is hardly ever at home during the day, spending most of his time helping other residents in the retirement community.

I was so pleasantly surprised that Ruth and I had several things in common. She was a pastor’s wife before her husband retired from the ministry. The couple have traveled all over the US and lived in several states as well as foreign countries. There were so many different places that they have lived in that she could not remember when I asked her! I shared with her that I also was a pastor’s wife and we exchanged experiences and impressions of life as a minister’s wife and living overseas. We also both share a love of crafting – almost any kind. Although Ruth made is very clear that she never enjoyed oil painting. She is a quilter, which I am also. She loves to sew and made many of her children’s clothes when they were small. Her mother was a seamstress by occupation, as was my grandfather. I felt like we shared a common bond in terms of crafting and even our personal histories. It was enjoyable to exchange stories and experiences.
Our initial interview went well. I must admit that there were a few times that I wished I could have gotten richer information from Ruth. For example, I asked her, “Can you think of a time when your involvement in your craft enabled you to better cope with stresses or difficulties?” She responded that she has not really had stress or difficulties in her life. While I am glad if that is true, I couldn’t help but think that surely everyone has difficulties. I interpreted this as an indication that Ruth sees life differently than others. She views difficulties as just a “molehill” and not a “mountain”. I respect and admire this. Ruth admitted that she has never experienced any major traumas, such as the death of a child or spouse. Ruth, her husband, and her children have enjoyed good health and strong relationships. In her own words, she “has had a very good life”.

I was amazed at how prolific Ruth has been in her art work. She showed me 6 to 8 full sized completely finished quilts, she said she has painted hundreds of shirts, she sews shawls, and has painted literally hundreds of watercolors.

Nonetheless, I think I had hoped for responses to my questions about the meaningfullness of crafting to be deeper and richer. Essentially, the primary purpose and meaning of painting and quilting in Ruth’s life is the pure enjoyment of it. This is, of course, an extremely important aspect for any hobby or creative activity. So, my research findings will focus on exactly what Ruth perceives as the most meaningful aspect of crafting to her – leisure and enjoyment. She mentioned other benefits, which I will elaborate on in my research paper.

I decided to take several pictures of Ruth within her home. I took a few field notes as well, which I have transcribed for electronic filing.

Other important things that I noted while I was there:
• photo diaries that Charles keeps of his wife’s paintings. About 7 of them, approximately 50 photos in each book.

• Music constantly playing hymns

• Ruth is smart and quick minded. No evidence of cognitive deficits or dementia. She occasionally forgot a date from the distant past, or a person’s name, however, this did not seem to be abnormal and was age appropriate. Actually, she struck me as very mentally sharp and intelligent.

• Ruth refers to her painting as “watercoloring”.

October 20, 2007:

**From my review of writing up narrative reports:**

(Thoughts as I review data and literature on narrative writings. I have spent hours and hours reading literature on narrative research. I feel compelled to write down some of my thoughts, although they don’t really seem to fit in a journal format, I put them here because they are simply my reflections on this research process).

I connect with what Czarniawska says about the issue of the “power” of the interviewer. I did not want to exude to Ruth a superior attitude (I’m an intelligent, non-approachable grad student). Did this affect my interviewing negatively? Was I too familiar with her? Did the data I collected have value, or was it just an insignificant conversation between two women? Should I have had more of an “interrogation” style, less friendly? Would this have improved my data, or elicited richer information? It seemed to me that if I took a “professional” approach, I may actually intimidate the Ruth, and consequently, stifle her responses. I asked myself the question: Who is the expert
here? Me? No. Ruth is the expert; I am the one who wants to learn from her. For what purpose? To more deeply understand HER crafting experiences, as well as to draw out useful conclusions for the field of occupational therapy.

Czarniawska, (p. 48), perfectly captures these personal struggles I was having as I interviewed Ruth for the first time. Czarniawska says that the researcher may be the professional in the field of research, but not the expert in the life of the subject. The role is somewhat ironic, both grad student researcher and student of the subject. She states, “The point is especially obvious in life stories (such as my narrative), where the narrators are the only experts on the question of their own lives” (p. 48). She goes on to state, “The power of the knowledge...lies on the side of the interviewee.

Furthermore, Czarniawska admits that in one of her research projects she received information she had not expected. She had hoped for more. It was her conclusion that individuals describe their own perceptions of their world, and that informs their decisions and actions. Therefore, whatever their perceptions are, it informs the research. She states, “An interview is not a window on a social reality but it is a part, a sample, of that reality” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 49).

Finding this discussion in Czarniawska has greatly relieved my mind in the research process. At one point in the initial interview, I realized that I was tempted to force certain areas of discussion in order to elicit the types of responses I had expected to hear from the subject. This was out of a fear that her responses were not sufficient for my study. I mentally reminded myself that I was not the focus of this study, and strangely, even my study was not the focus of the study. The focus was Ruth, and her answers were 100% accurate because they were her truthful answers. I did not need to change them,
enhance them, or manipulate them to make them fit my expectations for my research. I did not want to manipulate the situation so that Ruth was a “puppet reciting what the researcher (in this case, me), had previously thought up” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 53). This mental realization was freeing. I was able to proceed with the interview with a renewed commitment to deeply understand THIS woman, regardless of my own expectations. For example, I asked the following question: “Can you think of a time when your involvement in your craft enabled you to better cope with stresses or difficulties?” Ruth’s response took me completely by surprise. She said, “I don’t have stresses.” I readily admit that this took me off guard and caused me a little fear regarding this type of answer for my research findings. I found myself mentally thinking, “That is not a typical response and will invalidate my research, or make it less useful, or weaken theory I hoped to see evolve through my research.” In fact, I feared that my mental response may have shown on my face, and I said, “That’s wonderful, and I sure don’t want to make you feel like you should!”

Later as I reflected on my reaction, I realized that, even though I was committed to the exploratory nature of narrative research and finding out the “lived experience” of the participant, I still had preconceived notions of what her “lived experience” should be. This was entirely contradictory to the whole philosophy of narrative research. I began to understand the importance of truthfulness in research and not invalidating the data with my own preconceived notions. My timely mental check allowed me to continue the research without invalidating it.

Later in the interview, I attempted to approach the subject of life stresses again, to allow Ruth an opportunity to rethink her answer. I did this in order to be sure I had not
dropped the topic prematurely. Also, I wanted to avoid a potential, albeit unintentional, misrepresentation by the participant in “putting her best food forward” for the interview. I asked the question, “In what ways does crafting fill a need in your life?” Again, no reference was made to difficulties or stresses. The only need she mentioned that could be interpreted as a difficulty, was that she had a need to fill time at home due to husband being frequently away from home. However, she reiterated that she had a wonderful life. This was a recurrent theme throughout the interview. For example, at other points in our discussion, Ruth made statements about having a good life. She appeared to have a high level of life satisfaction.

October 26, 2007

Today I had a wonderful time with Ruth. I felt like we had become completely comfortable with each other and that we were “friends”. Ruth opened up today and shared many more details about her life with me. For example, we worked on a timeline that I had developed. I requested that she look it over and put in the correct dates for certain events in her life. This led to several interesting stories about her life. I began to understand Ruth more as a real person today, not just a subject for my research. I am even more convinced than ever that she is a remarkable and talented woman.

Perhaps the most exciting and precious thing to come out of today’s visit with Ruth was the Memoirs. Today Ruth informed me that, among her many other creative talents, she loves to write. I expressed interest in this and so Ruth showed me a 3-ring binder filled with her writings. She referred to these as “memories”, as opposed to a diary. As I glanced through it I realized that I was reading the work of an exceptional writer. Not only were the pages filled with interesting topics and titles (i.e., Model T’s
and Rocky Mountains), but her insights into life were astounding. I was so completely taken with this book that I asked to borrow it. I have just spent 2 hours reading through this book, and I find myself almost speechless at its simplicity, beauty, and wisdom. At times I felt that I was reading something nearly sacred because of her transparency and honesty with the events of her life (i.e., Memories of Father, her father having been an alcoholic). The more I read of Ruth’s memoirs, the more deeply convinced I became of the privilege of doing research with her.

I am also excited to have access to the Memoirs because of several references made to Ruth’s art activities in the book. Clearly her involvement in the arts has great meaning to her leading her to include several mentions of it in her Memoirs.

Today I purchased one of Ruth’s paintings. It is extremely special to me. Ruth was painting this picture, a European-style garden area, when I first met her. At our first meeting, in the art room at CRC, I did not know that she would be my research subject. I was simply touring the facility with a volunteer coordinator. I remembered the picture Ruth was painting more than I remembered her face! Later I asked her if she was the woman painting the picture I remembered. She showed me the painting and the connection was made! I knew that I would purchase that picture, both as a memento of Ruth and my thesis research, but also as a reward to myself for earning a Master’s Degree in Occupational Therapy at 46 years of age!! I deserve a reward!

October 27, 2007

I have been rereading Ruth’s memoirs as I write chapter 4 of my thesis. As I’ve reflected on my initial impressions of Ruth, I am ashamed to admit that I was completely wrong in my assumptions about her. At the initial interview, Ruth indicated that she
really didn’t have any stresses in life, nothing that she report as having been a time of depression. At the time I found this rather odd. I assumed that she was not a deep thinker, not a psychologically minded individual, rather simplistic. I could not have been more wrong. Now, as I read her memoirs, I realize that she DID have great difficulties in her life: she grew up in extreme poverty, her father was an alcoholic, her mother sickly, she was taken out of her home to live in a “billet” as a 6 year old because of inadequate care at home. Ruth lived through the depression, and the rationing of meat, butter, coffee and gasoline. The love of her life, Charles, went off to WWII in the 1940’s and an injury blinded him for three months in 1945. After their marriage, they also lived in poor circumstances until the children were old enough to allow Ruth to work part time. One of Ruth’s grandchildren was born with spina bifida. Because of Charles’ work in the ministry, Ruth was forced to move nearly every three or four years, without owning her own home, which was a dream of hers. Finally, in 1983, Ruth was able to purchase a beautiful century old home in Homer, Michigan, where her dreams came true. She opened a bed and breakfast. It was like “heaven on earth” to her. But, this dream soon fizzled away as her daughter and two grandchildren needed to move into the home and Ruth had to care for the two young ones 9 hours day. She was unable to do this and keep the bed and breakfast. She sold her dream house, a great disappointment to her. She commented about this, “The things that we do for our children....”

So, it is clear that Ruth has known great difficulty and disappointment. It is her faith in God and her optimistic attitude that keep from depression and looking on the dark side. Her memoirs reveal the depth of her heart and the wisdom she has gained over her 80 years.
Next week, on Thursday, Ruth will turn 80. I am scheduled to meet with her on that day. I have ordered vintage Tillie the Toiler paper dolls for her originally from a 1930’s newspaper through e-Bay. I hope she will be pleasantly surprised.

November 1, 2007

Today I met only briefly with Ruth. I wanted to have her look over my most recent data compilation and interpretation and give me feedback on its accuracy. We discussed the timeline, which she had kindly corrected for me. I also talked to her a little about a thought I had when reading through her Memoirs. It dawned on me that, though she had not directly said this, that her years in the bed and breakfast were an art form. It was my thinking that part of the reason this was so meaningful to her was that she had the opportunity to be artistic and resurrect some of her love creating. Perhaps this period of time was a sort of transition for her. The bed and breakfast allowed her to continue serving others but also enjoy her love of creativity. A sort of combining and transitioning all in one. It was amazing to see that as we reviewed this concept, that she had written nearly the same thing in her notes validating my findings. I felt this was a confirmation that my interpretations of her story were trustworthy. This was a great encouragement!

November 16, 2007

Today I visited Ruth. This was not part of the research process, but just because I wanted to see her. Several weeks ago she had invited me to come the ILF for their annual craft fair. So, I went to that today and bought 10 Christmas cards from Ruth. She seemed delighted to see me, and I was even more delighted to see her. She had probably 150 to 200 cards, made by Charles from her paintings, out on the table for sale. Also, she was
selling her shawls that she invented. She looked beautiful in one of the shawls that she had made, a peach-colored floral print.

I must admit I was sad today. I had a sense of closure with the research. I gave Ruth a gift certificate as a token of my thanks for her involvement in this thesis. The gift certificate was carefully selected. I wanted her to have a nice experience, one that would have meaning for her. The gift certificate is for a local restaurant, Magnolia, on Lake Street. The restaurant is housed in an old turn-of-the-century home. It reminds me somewhat of the pictures Ruth showed me of the bed and breakfast that she loved so much. I hope she and Charles enjoy eating there. I imagine them eating in front of the one of huge marble fireplaces and reminiscing about their beloved bed and breakfast days!

I have also ordered two original Tillie the Toiler paper dolls from newspapers in the 1930's to give to Ruth. They have not arrived in the mail as of today. I can't wait to see her face when she looks at them and remembers her childhood dreams! I guess I will see her one more when I give those to her. Oh, good! It's not over yet....!
Appendix E

Researcher’s Field Notes

Initial Interview with “Ruth”
Location: In Ruth’s apartment at Clark Retirement Community
October 5, 2007

- Apartment is located on a quiet back street behind Clark Retirement Community
- Apartment is a small, one bedroom, living, dining/kitchen area
- Four apartments in one building with a hallway connecting them
- Shared 4-season room
- Four apartments share a garden patch, located just behind the 4-season room
- Charles was not present
- Apartment is neat and clean
- Many family photos are on the refrigerator
- Photo diaries – Charles keeps of every picture
- Sewing/craft station set up in bedroom – 2 cupboards of materials, quilts under bed, sewing projects on the floor and on the wall.
- Hymns playing
- Ruth hums off and on during the interview, particularly when she is showing me her quilts

Second Interview with “Ruth”
Location: The main building of Clark Retirement Community
October 12, 2007

- Large building
- Narrow hallways lead to the art room
- Art room is approximately 15’ x 40’
- Set up mostly for painting: large matting table, 3 crafting tables, several easels, large cork boards on the walls with paintings pinned to them
- 2 other individuals in the room working on paintings
- Ruth has several paintings on display in the hallway – approximately 7 or 8.
- Ruth hums off and on as she shows me her paintings
Appendix F

Consent Form for Research

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project, entitled: “A Narrative Study: Exploration of Arts and Crafts as Meaningful Productivity in an Older Adult”. The purpose of the study is to explore the importance and meaning of engaging in arts and crafts for an older adult. Sara Thornburg, OTS, is the individual conducting the study and she is enrolled in a Master’s level occupational therapy program at Grand Valley State University.

The total amount of time required to participate in this study is approximately 4½ hours, spread out over a 2 to 3 month period. You were selected for this research because of your active involvement in crafting, the fact that you live in an independent living facility, and because you are between the ages of 75 and 84.

The following information explains the steps in this research project:

1. A meeting will be set up with you in a private room at the independent living facility where you reside.
2. During this meeting you will be interviewed. Questions will center on your experiences in making arts and crafts and you will be encouraged to tell stories about your experiences.
3. The initial interview will last approximately 1 to 1½ hours. (This may be divided into shorter interviews, if you desire).
4. The interview will be audio taped.
5. You will be asked to demonstrate how you make your artwork or craft.
6. During this demonstration, pictures and videotaping will take place.
7. You will be given the opportunity to show some of your completed craft items to the researcher, and these will also be photographed.
8. You will be given the opportunity to share diaries or schedules of your crafting activities.
9. Approximately 3-4 weeks after this initial interview, another meeting will be set up with you to discuss the research findings. This meeting will last approximately 2 to 3 hours.

There are minimal risks to you as a result of involvement in this research. Fatigue may be a risk factor. The researcher will be sensitive to your need for rest and the interview will be terminated and rescheduled if you become too fatigued to continue. Anticipated benefits to you are: that you will enjoy sharing your personal stories of crafting, that you will have a sense of pride in your accomplishments as an artist, and that you will experience a sense of satisfaction in participating in a Master’s level research project.
Your participation is voluntary and there will be no monetary compensation. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator, you may contact the Grand Valley State University, Human Subjects Review Committee Chair, Paul Reitemier, Ph.D. at the following phone number: (616)331-3417.

If you have any other questions regarding involvement in this research project, you may contact the chair of the thesis committee, Nancy J. Powell, Ph.D., OTR, FAOTA, at (616)331-3128. You may also feel free to contact the primary researcher, Sara E. Thornburg, at (616)897-0551.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study, or to withdraw at any time, without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or Grand Valley State University. If you decide to withdraw, please contact Sara Thornburg by phone at (616)897-0551.

I hereby authorize the researchers to release the information obtained in this study for use in scientific literature. I have been informed that photographs and/or videotaping of me and my artwork will be obtained. I have been informed that my name will be kept confidential.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information and that I agree to participate in this study.

(Participant’s Signature)  (Date)
Appendix G

Participant’s Handwritten Feedback Notes

(See following pages)
Life Stages in the Subject’s Artistic Narrative

The aim of this study was to explore the meaningfulness of arts and crafts in the life of a middle-aged adult. A deeper understanding of the role and purpose of arts and crafts as an important occupation was explored. The use of narrative research allowed the researcher to collect stories and experiences of crafting from the participant and to obtain data that would richly define the importance to her of engagement in this occupation. Several forms of data were collected including transcripts of semi-structured interviews/conversations, field notes, photos, artifacts, and the researcher’s personal journal. During analysis of the data, several stages of Ruth’s life emerged. These stages represented transitions in her life that influenced her involvement in her arts and crafts. Creswell refers to the use of life stages in narrative research as an important means of re-structuring the subject’s life story (Creswell, 2007). He further refers to the use of life transitions or “chronological linkages” as a form of data analysis. Talk to Ruth about the things that are highlighted here regarding truthfulness and accuracy.

Childhood stage: colored paper doll, drew freehand clothing for her.

Art Activity: drawing, Tillie the Toiler, learned to sew.

Meaning of Art: pleasure, enjoyment, hopes/dreams of becoming a dress designer.

(Didn’t really think she would be.)
Young wife and mother:
17 years old – marriage – children. - Lloyd & thousands of other men came home from WWII - Baby Boomers

Art Activity: arts and crafts with the children, sewing clothes for children and self, not much art for her own pleasure. (ask Ruth – was this a “Productive art form?”; a necessity?) - Both

Meaning of Art: less for pleasure, more productive and utilitarian

Pastor’s wife (overlaps with young wife and mother stage):

Art Activity: Little time for pleasurable art but did take one oil painting course during her 30’s. Art in the form of SS projects (a productive art form?) Continues to sew.

Meaning of Art: less for personal pleasure, with the exception of the oil painting for 3 years (did not really enjoy this, took painting materials to Africa and left them there); more productive and utilitarian art. Continued sewing in Zambia.

Worked for 10 years at Friend of the Court (1965-1973)

1973-1976 - in Zambia

Art Activity: ????????? Ask Ruth (Art teacher at Andela Ecumenical Foundation) - My best friend in Zambia (Good and Campus)

Meaning of Art: ???????

Bought bed & breakfast - Ruth ran it/still preaching for Art.
Retirement and into the bed and breakfast - Beautiful for old home.

Still busy, little time for leisure art, (ask Ruth more questions about this). Very involved at this point with helping daughter after divorce to get “back on her feet”.

91
Spent 1 year in Puerto Rico. (Get an accurate timeline from Ruth. Ask her to check timeline.)

Art Activity: Entertaining and caring for a bed and breakfast could be considered an art form with "my house was my art" - beautiful, fulfilling and fulfilling things so colorful.

Meaning of Art: Ruth enjoyed running the bed and breakfast. Why? What was enjoyable? Were there creative aspects that made it enjoyable? Move into Clark Retirement Community.

Art Activity: Art in full bloom! Takes up quilting, oil painting, and more enjoyable sewing, less utilitarian art forms. Art is entirely for pleasure and social activity now. Sells items, but not out of necessity. Even the sewing is not a required thing like when the children were young, it is for fun (inventive – created the shawl).

Meaning of Art: Major theme of Ruth’s life now in terms of meaningfulness of art is enjoyment, pleasure, social activity in the art room, solitary activity with quilting in the home.

Future

Art Activity: Continue with water colors since this is so enjoyable. But may branch out into other art forms. Never bored. Always find something to do, even if for some reason she could not continue painting or quilting. If disability prevents her from water coloring and quilting she “will find something else to do”.

(Picture of monkey - man from Traverse City visited last, saw picture, started home. It came back to get picture – further called him a monkey.)
Meaning of Art: Anticipate art to continue to have entirely a pleasurable meaning, not for productivity. Continue to be a social activity with the painting, and a solitary occupation with the quilting. Anticipate that her interest in the arts will cause her to continue to explore other art forms, or other “inventions” in art. (Ask her about this).

A timeline was developed by the researcher to illustrate the stages in Ruth’s life that influenced her engagement in arts and crafts.

Footnote: She may be one of my greatest talents. Helping others gives me great satisfaction. Being a preacher’s wife gave me plenty of opportunity. With foster children during the years just before going to Leacock, the retirement home helped daughter and 2 sisters with housing—else son. At present one house, one sister in (he’s unemployed—so we now or less support home) one house, sister lives in. She pays very minimum rent (but she’s not a “pay lady,” which she might otherwise have become). Helped other family members who weren’t as blessed as we.
Alternate Life Stages Timeline

1927 to 1945

Childhood Years

Marriage and young motherhood

Pastor's wife/moving/travel

Retirement

Bed & Breakfast

Travel

1973 to 1980

Moved to Clark

Retirement Community

1985

Future?

Clark

1945 to 1973

1980 to 1985

Expect to live to at least age 90-2014