The Recall of Strens, Traumas & T-S Experiences by Adults

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1978
The Recall of
Strens, Traumas, and T-S Experiences
by Adults

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
by
Phyllis F. Hatfield
June 1978
The Recall of
Strens, Traumas, and T-S Experiences
by Adults

Recommended  ___________, 1978
(Date)

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(Date)

Dean of Graduate College
Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge myself with a special thanks to my fingers for typing the 15 thousand rough drafts of this thesis. I hope that who ever reads this realizes that is a slight exaggeration.

Also I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Elsie Dotson who is an inspiring teacher and a very special friend. To Dr. David Shiek and Dr. Dean Grice I would like to say thank you for your guidance.

To my family and friends, thank you for the words of encouragement and smiles. And last but not least I would like to acknowledge the participants in this study who were willing to share parts of their lives with me.

(I believe that gets about everyone involved.)
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There is a developing trend in psychology to study the healthy personality. Investigations have been conducted which attempt to identify and study meaningful experiences as they occur in a person's life. These studies have focused on both the negative and positive experiences and the consequences of these experiences in the life and personality of persons. One of the researchers in this area, Norman Finkel (1974; 1975), investigated the incidence and pattern of three types of experiences in the lives of college students. The three types of experiences which he investigated were traumas (T), strengthening experiences (S), and traumas that were reconstrued as strengthening experiences (T-S). His results suggested a change in the occurrence of these experiences over the life span. The 103 participants, 28 males and 75 females, used in this study were drawn from: adult Sunday-school classes, graduate extension classes, a regional pastoral association, and a group of vocational counselors. The mean age of the sample was 36.5, with an age range of from 22 to 65 years of age.
Data were collected through the use of a questionnaire which instructed the participant to recall traumatic and strengthening experiences. A chi square analysis was used to determine the level of significance among the frequencies of the types of experiences and the differences of the frequency of the age at which the different types of experiences occurred. The patterns of the experiences over the life spans were analyzed through graphic representation. The data indicated that there were no significant differences in the number or types of experiences recalled by males versus females or by persons of different ages. However, when the types of experiences were analyzed separately for each sex, females recalled a significantly greater number of T's than S's or T-S's. Significant interactions were found between types of experiences recalled and the age occurrence. Traumatic experiences were recalled as occurring during the earlier part of life, strengthening experiences as occurring during adolescence, and T-S experiences as occurring later in life. The most frequent consequence of the S experience was to change self perceptions. The T experience appeared to have a greater tendency to effect the perception of and the interpersonal relations with others. The majority of the T-S experiences resulted in a greater awareness, empathy, or appreciation, or in reconstruing the environment or one's behavior more realistically.
Chapter I
Literature Review

Within the past twenty years psychology has begun to concern itself with the study of the healthy personality. Attention has been directed toward understanding the individual's well-being and improving the quality of man's existence. This trend can be traced to several sources: Psychoanalytic theorists have focused on ego psychology and the study of healthy coping devices, existential theorists have stressed freedom of choice and the importance of finding satisfying values and guiding one's life by them, and the humanistic movement has concentrated on the actualization of the self and the realization of human potential.

Out of this movement have grown new concepts and new areas of investigation to identify and understand meaningful experiences as they occur in man's life. These investigations have dealt with both positive and negative experiences and the consequent effects of these experiences in the life and personality of persons.

Intense Experiences

One of the pioneers in these investigations into the intense experiences of the normal individual was Abraham
Maslow (1968) who collected numerous accounts of meaningful experiences from personal interviews, letters, and responses to questionnaires. These questionnaires instructed the individuals to recall the most wonderful experience of experiences from their life. In addition, Maslow asked the respondents: how they felt different about themselves at the time of the experience, how they change, if they did, how the world looked different, and what their impulses were.

From these accounts Maslow coined the term "peak experience" which he defined as "an episode, or spurt in which the powers of the person came together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way" (1968, p. 97). He stated that these experiences could be found in "any experience of real excellence, of real perfection, of any moving toward the perfect justice or toward perfect values" (p. 175). The consequences for the individuals were discovering parts of their identity. As expressed by Maslow, the individual learns "to be a human being in general and to be this particular human being" (p. 170).

Privette (1964) studied a different type of positive human experience, "transcendent functioning," which she described as behavior that "could be evaluated as more efficient, more creative, more productive, or in some way better than modal behavior by the individual" (p. 3406). She stated that universally human beings possessed the ability to operate under some conditions at a level which was superior
to their average or modal levels of functioning. The purpose of her study was to identify common elements associated with the descriptions of transcendent functioning.

Through the use of a questionnaire she extracted from college and adult education students a narrative account of transcendent functioning and modal functioning. Privette found transcendent functioning to be a psychological entity and a crucial facet of human experience. Analysis of her data yielded the following factors as being important in transcendent functioning: (a) a clear focus on self and the object, (b) a determination to reach a goal or excel, (c) an awareness of others in a positive sense, (d) an intense involvement and commitment, and (e) a spontaneous expression of power (Landsman, 1967). According to Privette transcendent functioning occurred if there were not any restraining influences from the environment or the person's psychological make-up. The data indicated that the major obstacles to transcendent functioning were unfulfilled psychological needs involving other persons.

In a study by Thorne (1963), data were gathered concerning "peak" and "nadir experiences" in an individual's life. He defined a peak experience as "a subjective experiencing of what is subjectively recognized to be one of the high points of life, one of the most exciting, rich, and fulfilling experiences that the person has ever had" (p. 248). Conversely, a nadir experience was a "subjective experience of what is subjectively recognized to be one of
the worst, most unpleasant, and harrowing experiences of life" (p. 248).

He asked young children, young adults, and older subjects to complete a sentence describing their most exciting experience and their worst experience. Thorne grouped the peak experiences into six major categories: sensual, emotional, cognitive, conative, self-actualizing, or climax experiences. Nadir experiences were considered to reflect the opposite poles of peak experiences and usually involved experiences with death, illness, tragedy, and degradation or deflation of the self. Thorne noted that there were "wide age, sex, intelligence, economic, and social differences in the types of peak and nadir experiences reported" (p. 250). However, he did not specify the relationships between these variables and the types of experiences reported.

Two researchers, Margoshes and Litte (1966), combined the concepts of Maslow's peak experiences and Thorne's nadir experiences into a larger, affectively neutral rubric of "vivid experiences." In other words this category contained both peak and nadir experiences. Using an open-ended questionnaire, they instructed two groups, normals and psychotics within an age range of 18 to 50, to recall the experiences that they remembered most vividly. Three judges classified these responses as peak, nadir or doubtful. Psychotic subjects reported more nadir experiences while normal subjects responded with more peak experiences.
However, responses from normal subjects tended to be flat and stereotype in comparison to the psychotics' responses. 

Sparked by Ted Landsman's interest in self-actualization or what he defined as "an individual's functioning on the highest level of his uniquely human characteristics" (1976, p. 37), several doctoral studies have been conducted at the University of Florida (Furest, 1965; McKenzie, 1967; Lynch, 1968). These studies were concerned with discerning factors that play a role in critical events in shaping one's life.

Furest (1965) studied "turning-point experiences" that is events which were perceived as causing a major change in one's life. These experiences were studied in terms of their positive or negative consequential effects on the subjects' lives.

An interesting finding by Furest was that some of the situations which were viewed as negative (i.e., illness or death of a relative, personal injury or illness, divorce or separation, change in parents' marital status) were seen by some subjects as having actuated positive consequences. Apparently experiences which were initially constructed as negative later brought about favorable consequences for the individual.

McKenzie (1967) followed up this finding by designing a study in which one of the purposes was to discern factors that were associated with the experiencing of positive consequences from an initial negative experience. He
defined "negative experiences" as "an event or series of connected events which were identifiable by the individual and which were remembered as being painful, frustrating, stressful or otherwise having negative effects when the event occurred" (p. 57). He was interested in two kinds of negative experiences, i.e., those that were seen by the experiencer as having had positive consequences in retrospect and those that were seen as having negative consequences in retrospect.

A total of 300 college students were asked to respond to two questionnaires: one specifically asking for a negative experience that had beneficial consequences for the subject and the other asking for a negative experience that had harmful consequences for the subject.

McKenzie found that persons reporting positive benefits from negative experiences reported significantly more often that a helping person was available during the experience than subjects reporting negative consequences from a negative experience. He also found that the time elapsed since the experience occurred and the reporting of the experience did not account for the change in the way the person viewed the experience. In relation to negative experiences which extended over a long period of time, the result suggested that these were more resistant to change because the greater amount of time provided an opportunity for the experience to produce more damaging effects. In other words, a negative experience which lasted for a longer duration of time was
more likely to be viewed by the person as having harmful consequences than an experience that lasted for a shorter period.

McKenzie also utilized two classification systems in categorizing negative human experiences. Using a classification system devised by Landsman for classifying positive experiences, McKenzie first classified these experiences according to whether they involved one's self in relation to the environment, one's self in relation to others, or an intrapersonal experience. According to his data negative experiences were reported most frequently in the self-other category, and least frequently in the self-environment category.

A second classification scheme, arrived at by defining the negative opposites of the seven categories that had been developed by Landsman for positive experiences, was also utilized. The following were the counterparts that McKenzie defined to the positive categories that Landsman developed.

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<th>Positive Category</th>
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5. The earned success  
6. The human relationship 
7. The suprahuman experience 

McKenzie found that the majority of the negative experiences could be placed in either the "negative human experience, direct sensory experience of extreme negative violence," or "the experience of failure" (p. 46).

Lynch (1968) sought to gain information concerning the effects of reported "intense experiences" on an individual and whether these experiences were reported as being painful, pleasurable, or a combination of both. He had 217 undergraduates and graduate students record the most intense experience which they could recall. An intense experience was described by Lynch as being the experience which the subject reported as having the greatest personal impact on his life. One of the questions which received attention was the "freeing" or "disabling" consequences these experiences had on the individual. The consequences of an experience was thought to have a disabling effect on the individual if it lead to an increase in defensiveness and encouraged avoidance in similar situations. In contrast, the consequences of experiences were thought to have freeing effects on the individuals if they tended to open them to a wider range of experiences.

As in McKenzie's study, a portion of this study was directed toward exploring whether these intense experiences
involved one's self in relation to others, one's self in relation to the external world, or an intrapersonal experience. Lynch also classified the intense experiences according to major repeating themes.

After studying the subjects' completed questionnaires, Lynch found the number of intense experiences judged as painful by the subjects were significantly greater than those judged pleasurable. He reported that most painful experiences had a freeing effect.

The data revealed that in some cases the subject's original perception of the experience had changed. Some experiences which were viewed as pleasurable on occurrence were reconstrued at a later time as being painful, and some painful experiences were later viewed as pleasurable. These experiences Lynch termed "sweet-bitter experiences" and "bitter-sweet experiences" respectively. The former had the tendency to close the person to subsequent similar experiences while the latter opened the individual to subsequent similar experiences. An interesting finding was that the incidence of bitter-sweet experiences out numbered the sweet-bitter experiences.

Lynch's data supported McKenzie's finding that intense experiences were significantly more often associated with another person than with the self. There was also evidence that intense experiences were more often intrapersonal than associated with the external world.

When classifying the experiences according to
repeating themes, he found that the major categories for pleasurable experiences and bitter-sweet experiences were: interpersonal relationships, self-recognition, birth or adoption of a child, sexual intercourse, and religious or mystical experiences. For painful experiences and sweet-bitter experiences, the major repeating themes were death, divorce or marital discord, fear of loneliness or unknown, sexual intercourse, and parental rejection.

Finkel (1974; 1975) conducted research to discover the incidence and kinds of experiences which persons report as strengthening and impairing their personality. His investigations dealt with "strens," and "traumas." The term stren, which Finkel borrowed from Hollister (1967), referred to "an experience that strengthened and produced growth in an individual's personality" (1974, p. 265). He considered it the opposite of trauma which was defined as "an experience that injured personality development" (p. 265).

In his first study Finkel (1974) sought to delineate some basic factors concerning the characteristics of strens and to derive a categorization schema for the strens and traumas based on the precipitating event. In order to gather data in this area, college students were asked to complete a questionnaire instructing them to recall in detail their strens and traumas.

His data revealed that traumas and strens were recalled with equal frequency. There was also evidence that traumas occurred significantly earlier in life than strens, and that
friends, family, and teachers played leading roles in both
strens and traumas. Finkel noted that strens were often
unexpected and had an immediate and long lasting beneficial
effect on the subject.

The categorization schema for strens and traumas
based upon precipitating events revealed that some types of
experiences were seen only as traumas. There were, however,
some experiences which were seen as strens by some of the
subjects and traumas by other subjects. What seemed to
be operating to determine evaluation was the subject's
perception and interpretation of the experience, not the
experience per se. He found that the stren- or trauma-
producing events were varied, but some situations and themes
were cited quite frequently. These included situations
involving love, social relationships, school, and family.

An unexpected finding was a type of experience that
Finkel labeled "T-S experience" which involved an experience
that was initially perceived as a trauma and later
reconstrued as a stren. The subject reported making a
second interpretation of the trauma which changed his
perception of the experience's consequences from negative
to positive. The T-S experiences seemed to occur at a later
age than the experiences that continued to be construed as
a trauma. The data also indicated that the subjects
themselves were for the most part responsible for the
reevaluation.

In a second study Finkel (1975) undertook to
investigate this conversion process and to answer some questions concerning how this process happens, who experiences it, and the duration of time necessary for the conversion process to occur.

As in the preceding study college students were asked to complete a questionnaire asking them to recall in detail their traumas and stresses. In addition, in this study Finkel interviewed the subjects individually to clarify vague points, fill in omissions and add details.

Data from this study suggested that a majority of subjects experienced events which they initially perceived as traumatic, but later viewed as a stren, i.e., T-S experiences. The reconstruing process appeared to be cognitive in nature. The first appraisal was most often a negative interpretation of self, the situation, a family member, or a friend, which was then replaced by a more optimistic or broadened construct. The consequences of this new evaluation were discovering "attributes (e.g. ability to cope, adapt, learn, grow, and become self-reliant and independent) which produced a greater sense of strength, depth, maturity, sensitivity, honesty, and self-confidence" (p. 175).

Consistent with the previous study the results indicated that the person himself was the significant figure in more than 60 percent of the reevaluations. Finkel found that the reconstruing of the experience did not happen immediately after the experience but appeared to occur
between 2 weeks and 4 months after the experience. Again, as in his earlier study he found that the T-S experience increased in frequency with an increase in age.

Also, Finkel found traumas to occur more frequently in childhood and to decrease in incidence as one matures, and that stresses were reported as increasing as one matures.

**Recall of Pleasant and Unpleasant Experiences**

In conducting research which asks subjects to recall positive and negative experiences, the question of differential retention of pleasant and unpleasant experiences arises. A number of studies has been conducted investigating this question.

Lynch made note of a study conducted by Jersild (1931) in which subjects were asked to report their pleasant experiences over a three week period. They were then asked to repeat the task recalling all their unpleasant experiences. After a 21 day period the subjects were again asked to recall their experiences of the earlier three week period. Recall of the originally reported experiences was significantly greater for the pleasant than for the unpleasant.

Meltzer (1931) asked students, who had just returned to college after Christmas, to describe their holiday and then list and rate their experiences as pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent. Six weeks later he asked the subjects to repeat the listing. Not only did they list more pleasant than unpleasant memories immediately after returning from
vacation, but after six weeks the predominance of pleasant over unpleasant memories had also increased.

A similar study was conducted by Water and Leeper (1936) in which subjects were asked to recall pleasant and unpleasant experiences which had occurred during a Christmas vacation. All subjects were asked to recall and rate these experiences immediately after their return. The subjects were then divided into seven groups based on the time elapse occurring between the first recall and the second recall ranging from a 2 to a 140 day elapse. The subjects were asked to rate each recalled experience in terms of affect value: slight, moderate, or extremely pleasant or unpleasant. The rating assigned to the experience was in terms of the affect associated with the experience at the time it occurred. In addition, the subjects at the time of the second recall were asked to indicate how often they had reviewed the experience since it had occurred.

Based on the data collected the researchers concluded that there was a tendency for a systemic shift in affective rating toward more moderate categories from the first recall to the second recall. Another conclusion was that the degree of affective value assigned to an experience was positively related to recall, but the qualitative value, whether it was pleasant or unpleasant, was not related to recall.

After surveying the research in this area, Gilbert (1938) concluded that experiences, whether they were
pleasant or unpleasant, decreased in affective intensity with increase time elapsed before recall. According to Gilbert, the affective tone may even be reversed in retrospect.

Dutta and Kanungo (1967) asked subjects to rate the intensity of affect associated with experimentally induced success and failure conditions under task- and ego-oriented instructions. The purpose of these instructions was to create, respectively, low and high stress or emotional involvement for the subjects. The researchers found that the recall of failure and success experiences was more a function of the intensity of affect rather than the particular failure or success of the experience.

Holmes (1970) carried out an investigation to identity factors underlying the selective recall of personal experiences. He tried to theoretically and experimentally reconcile two conclusions reached by former researchers: (a) unpleasant experiences were less likely to be recalled than pleasant, and (b) affectively moderate experiences were less likely to be recalled than intense experiences, whether they were pleasant or unpleasant.

He asked 26 subjects to record their pleasant and unpleasant experiences for a seven-day period and to rate the intensity of affect associated with these experiences on a nine point scale. One week later each subject was instructed to recall the experiences he had recorded during the seven-day period and to rate each experience according to how he felt about it at that time. The data showed that
the predominant change in affect over time was a decrease in intensity, and that this increase in intensity reduced the chances that the experiences would be recalled. Furthermore, there was a greater tendency for unpleasant experiences to decrease in intensity upon subsequent recall and ratings than pleasant experiences to decrease in intensity.

The research relevant to the differential effects of affect on memory appears to be inconclusive and incomplete, therefore, only tentative statements can be made. One of the questions that seemingly has not been studied is the effect of affect on the retention over a long span of time, i.e., years.

Based on the preceding information, it would appear that recall of experience, pleasant or unpleasant, is associated with the degree of affect intensity attached to the experience. Intense experiences are more readily recalled than moderate experiences. There is also some indication that there is a change in affective tone over time toward a moderate range; it would seem that there is a greater tendency for unpleasant experiences to decrease in affective intensity than pleasant experiences, thus they are less likely to be recalled.
Chapter II

Statement of the Problem

There is a developing trend in psychology to study the normal or the healthy personality and at present this particular movement is in virgin territory. The behavior in this area needs more description and defining before comprehensive explanations are attempted.

It is a maxim in psychology that some events can and do effect one's personality. Norman Finkel (1974; 1975) has defined two types of experiences, strens and traumas, that are instrumental in effecting personality. He collected data from college students that yielded information relevant to the incidences of these two types of experiences throughout the age span of the subjects. The frequency distributions of the three types of events, strens, traumas, and T-S, were provocative in that they suggested a change occurs in the types of experiences that one has as one matures. The fact that his subjects were young adults limited our knowledge concerning this shift in types of experiences over their life span.

The recent interest and exploration into the developmental phases of midlife (Nurgarten, 1968; Sheehy, 1976) adds further interest in the relative frequency and
types of experiences of more mature adults. The problem then basically is to extend Finkel's work by collecting data on the frequency and the age of occurrence of strens, traumas, and trauma-strens experiences from an older population. The study is therefore designed to explore six questions relevant to the occurrence of strens, traumas, and trauma-strens.

1. Is there a difference in the number of experiences reported by males and females?

2. Is there a difference in the types of experiences reported by males and females?

3. Is there a change in the number of experiences reported by persons of different ages?

4. Is there a difference in the types of experiences reported by persons of different ages?

5. Is there a difference in the frequency with which the three types of experiences tend to occur over the first 21 years of life?

6. Is there a pattern in the occurrence of the three types of experiences over the life span?
   (a) What is the pattern for the first 21 years of life?
   (b) What is the pattern for the span of life up through 49 years of age?

Further, an attempt will be made to categorize these experiences in terms of the consequences of the experience for the person who had the experience.
Chapter III
Method

Subjects

The 103 participants, 28 males and 75 females, used in this study were drawn from the following adult population: adult Sunday-school classes at six protestant churches, four graduate extension classes consisting primarily of public school teachers, one regional pastoral association, and one group of vocational counselors working at a state employment agency. A total of 366 questionnaires was distributed to these groups of persons and 103 (28%) were returned.

The mean age of the sample was 36.5 years, with an age range of from 22 to 65 years of age. Eighty-seven participants were married, 12 were single, and 4 were divorced (see Table A). The educational level of the participants were as follows: 4.8% had completed high school, 53% had completed or partially completed a bachelor's degree, 37% had completed or partially completed a master's degree, and 6% had completed a doctor's degree or Rank I (see Table B). A majority of the subjects were employed in professional and skilled occupations (see Table C).

The problem faced when seeking participants to be
included in this study was that of finding mature men and women with whom two contacts could easily be made within a short time interval. It was decided to look for groups of mature men and women who were meeting frequently and regularly, i.e., daily or weekly. It seemed logical that the longer the participants had the questionnaires to be filled out the higher the probability of procrastination on their part, or of the questionnaires being misplaced.

Those groups best meeting the requirements, i.e., mature men and women, meeting at frequent and regular intervals, were the churches and college classes. An effort was made to enlist a group of firemen as participants but this group chose not to participate in the study. The other vocational settings that were approached, and who chose to participate, were the local state employment office and regional pastoral association. Some difficulty was experienced getting individuals outside of a school setting to participate.

It is recognized that this particular sample imposes limitations on the generalizations that can be made. The educational level of the sample is higher than that of the general population. In addition, the occupational status held by the majority of participants constituting the sample is higher than that of the general population. These were not viewed as serious limitations since this study is a pioneer study in the investigation of strens, traumas, and trauma-streens and is more descriptive than explanatory in
nature. Further, it was thought that persons in these groups would be more inclined to participate in the study.

**Instrument**

Data for this study was obtained through the use of a questionnaire (see Appendix D). The content of this questionnaire was taken primarily from the one used by Finkel (1975) in his research. However, two examples, one of a stren and the other of a trauma, were added in an attempt to give greater clarity to the terms of "stren" and "trauma."

**Procedure**

The method for distributing the questionnaires was as follows: the questionnaires were given to the Sunday school classes at the beginning of class, the instructors of the extension classes gave them to the students at the beginning of a regular class meeting, the director of the pastoral association distributed the questionnaires at a meeting of the association, and they were given to the vocational counselors by their supervisor at the end of a work day. In each incidence the questionnaires were collected a week later.

Before the questionnaires were distributed to the participants a brief introduction was presented by the author and the cooperation of the participants was requested (see Appendix E). The importance of each individual's contribution was emphasized and assurance was given that the participants would remain anonymous. The participants were also informed
that a brief summary of the completed study would be available to them if they were interested.

Scoring and Analysis of the Data

Establishing scorer reliability. Three scorers were asked to read the experiences from 15 questionnaires and classify each experience recorded in the questionnaires as a stren (S), a trauma (T), or a trauma-stren (T-S) experience. The scorers included two faculty members in the department of psychology, and the author, a graduate student completing the second and last year in a two year graduate program in psychology. The 15 questionnaires were randomly selected from the total of 103 questionnaires collected in this study. The randomization technique used was to select every third questionnaire from the total number of questionnaires until a sum of 15 questionnaires was reached.

The guidelines for classifying an experience as a S, T, or T-S experience were based on Finkel's definitions of these experiences. He defined a T as an experience that injured the personality, a S as an experience that strengthened the personality, and a T-S experience as an experience that was initially perceived by the individual as traumatic but later was reconstrued as a S. There was a total of 49 experiences in these 15 questionnaires and the three scorers were in agreement in the classification of 38 of them, or 77.5% agreement.

In an attempt to increase the percentage of agreement among the scorers, differences in classification were
discussed and additional guidelines for classifying an experience as T, S, or T-S were formulated (see Appendix F). Using these guidelines as a basis for classification a second set of 15 questionnaires was randomly selected from the questionnaires, not including the set of 15 questionnaires used in the first classification. There was a total of 45 experiences in these 15 questionnaires and the scorers were in agreement in the classification of 42 of them, or 93% agreement. The remainder of the experiences were read and classified by the author.

Data organization. The data was organized into two different classification schemes. In the first scheme the data was organized and classified according to the age of the participants, and in the second the data was organized and classified according to the age of the occurrence of the reported experience.

The participants were grouped according to three age ranges, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49+. These age ranges were established to help determine whether there was a change in the number or type of experiences reported by persons of different ages.

To determine if there was a pattern in the frequency of S, T, and T-S experiences over the life span of an individual, the age of occurrence of these experiences were grouped according to developmental age periods. The developmental periods were: 0-5, 6-12, 13-17, 18-21, 22-34, 35-49. The rational for the use of developmental age periods
was that it seemed logical that the incidences of experiences would be related to the developmental stages that occur during a life span.

The total number of experiences recalled by the participants was 234, 232 of which could be classified either as a T, S, or T-S experience. Two experiences could not be classified because the participant did not include sufficient information to determine if the experience was a T, S, or T-S. Of the 232 scorable experiences, 75 were classified as S, 95 as T, and 62 as T-S. The mean number of experiences recalled per participant was 2.25.

When classifying the experiences according to age of occurrence it was possible to designate an age of occurrence for 226 experiences and for eight experiences this was not possible. In these eight experiences, the experience took place over a protracted period of time (e.g., "all my life"). If the experience took place over a short interval of time, i.e., two or three years, the earlier year was chosen as the age of occurrence.

A chi square analysis was used to determine the level of significance among the frequencies of experiences, the differences in the frequencies of the types of experiences, and the differences of the frequency of the age at which the different types of experiences occurred.

The patterns of experiences over the life spans were analyzed through graphic representation. There were two graphs, one including all participants and covering the age
span from birth to 21 years thus giving a relative distribution of experiences as they occur through the age of 21. The second graphic representation included only those participants 49 years of age and older and included those experiences reported as occurring up through the age of 49. Since there were only three experiences reported as occurring after the age of 49 it was decided not to represent these three experiences and to use 49 years of age as a cut off point. The rationale for the second graphic representation was to give a relative frequency distribution of experiences for older participants thus helping to extend Finkel's research.

Finally, the T, S, and T-S experiences were categorized according to the consequences of the experience for the participant. There was a total of 232 experiences that could be classified as a T, S, or T-S experience. Sixty-four of these experiences could not be categorized according to the consequences of the experience due to insufficient information or vagueness in the explanation of the consequences to the participant. There was a total of 77 T's, 48 S's, and 43 T-S's that were categorized.
Chapter IV

Results

Number and Types of Experiences

The data indicated that there were no significant differences in the number and types of experiences recalled by males versus females or by persons of different ages, however, the data suggested that there were differences in patterns of occurrence over age spans for the three types of experiences.

The first question of this study was concerned with whether there was a significant difference in the number of experiences reported by males and females. A chi square analysis yielded a value which was not significant, $\chi^2 (1) = .205 \ p < .05$.

The second question which was addressed was whether there were significant differences in the types of experiences reported by males and females. The chi square analysis yielded a value which was not significant, $\chi^2 (2) = 4.27 \ p < .05$. Since no significant differences were found between the sexes in the number or types of experiences recalled, this distinction was dropped in subsequent analysis. The data was not analyzed separately according to sex.

However, one analysis of the differences in types of
experiences recalled by each sex was done. This analysis showed that the females recalled a significantly larger number of T's than S's or T-S's, $\chi^2 (2) = 10.35 \ p < .05$, and there was no differences in the types of experiences reported by the males, $\chi^2 (2) = 1.02 \ p < .05$.

The third question which was addressed was whether there were significant differences in the number of experiences reported by persons of different ages. A chi square analysis was performed on the number of experiences recalled by the participants in each of the three age ranges. The value yielded was not significant, $\chi^2 (2) = 1.106 \ p < .05$.

The fourth question which was investigated was whether there were significant differences in the types of experiences reported by persons of different ages. No significant differences were found in the types of experiences reported by the participants in the three age ranges, $\chi^2 (4) = 1.217, \ p < .05$.

The fifth question was related to the age at which the experiences occurred during the first 21 years of life. In other words, were there more T's at one age, more S's at another, and more T-S's at still another. The interactions between age and types of experiences were examined with a chi square analysis (Table D). The interactions were found to be significant, $\chi^2 (6) = 24.05, \ p < .05$.

This analysis was restricted to the first 21 years of life in order to include all the participants. A similar analysis for later years was omitted because reduced
sample size rendered it statistically meaningless.

The last question was concerned with the relative frequency of the different types of experiences as they are distributed over the developmental periods for two age spans.

The first age span encompassed the developmental periods from birth to 21 years of age and included all the participants (see Figure 1). The second age span included the developmental periods from birth to age 49 (see Figure 2), and included only those participants who were 49 years or older. The frequency distributions are presented in percentage form in order to make the two graphs comparable.

The two frequency graphs show that traumatic experiences were reported as occurring in the early part of life, i.e., the first 18 years of life (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). For all participants the largest number of T's were reported as being in the developmental age period from 6-12 (see Table 1). However, when the older participants were considered by themselves, the T's peaked in the developmental age period from 13-17 (see Table 2).

The largest number of S's was reported for all participants as occurring during the developmental age period of 13-17 (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Older participants reported S's as peaking during the developmental age period of 18-21 (see Figure 2 and Table 2). There was a tendency for S's to gradually drop after they peaked.

There was a slight tendency for T-S experiences to increase up through the age of 17 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).
after which the T-S experiences decreased. In the older participants' graph the T-S experiences begin to increase again, reaching a pronounced peak in the developmental period of 22-34 (see Figure 2).

Categorization of the Experiences According to Consequences

The last step in the analysis of the data was to categorize the experiences according to the consequences of the experience for the person. Not all of the experiences could be categorized according to its consequences due to insufficient information or vagueness in the explanation of the consequences.

Of the 232 experiences which could be classified as T, S, or T-S, 168 experiences or 72% could be categorized according to the consequences the experiences had for the participants. The following are the numbers and percentages that could be categorized for each type of experience: of the 75 experiences classified as S's, 48 experiences or 64%, of the 95 experiences classified as T's 77 experiences or 81%, and of the 62 experiences 43 experiences or 69%. The categories arrived at when categorizing the consequences of the S's, T's, and T-S's are presented in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5 respectively. In an attempt to lend further clarification each category is illustrated by an example of an experience which was placed in that category.
FIGURE I

Frequency Distribution for the Three Types of Experiences from Birth to 21 Years of Age for All Participants
# TABLE I

Percentage of the Types of Experiences Recalled at each Developmental Age Period from Birth to 21 Years of Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Experience</th>
<th>Percentage Recalled at Each Age Period&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>.06 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-S</td>
<td>.02 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The number in parenthesis is the number of that type of experience recalled at that developmental age period.
FIGURE 2

Frequency Distribution for the Three Types of Experiences from Birth to 49 Years of Age for Participants 49 Years of Age or Older
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Experience</th>
<th>Percentage Recalled at Each Age Period&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>.04 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-S</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The number in parenthesis is the number of that type of experience recalled at that developmental age period.
### TABLE 3

**Categorization of the Consequences of the S Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%a</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The S experience resulted in an increase in self confidence.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1. One participant reported that she began to date a popular boy in high school, consequently she gained self confidence and felt better about herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The S experience seemed to change or give direction to one's life.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2. A participant recalled that a typing teacher had complimented her on her typing. This gave her the incentive to pursue business as a career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The result of the S experience was a new way of interpreting or construing a type of experience.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3. As a teacher, a person recalled that she had to interview a student in his home. She was forewarned to expect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 3—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%a</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;anything.&quot; Although the family was poor and uneducated they were polite and honest. She learned not to judge others by their educational level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The S experience resulted in a reconstruction of an experience followed by a change in behavior.  

4. A participant recalled that as a teenager she drove fast until one friend expressed his concern and asked her to slow down. She no longer viewed fast driving as smart and there after drove slowly.  

5. The S experience resulted in an increase of pride due to identification with a group.  

5. A person reported that during a teacher's meeting she became aware of the pride she felt as a result of being associated with her fellow teachers.  

aThese percentages are based on the 48 S experiences whose consequences were categorizable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%a</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The T experience</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1. Her parents would not let her go to dances or other peer activities, as a result she developed a deep resentment toward her parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The T experience</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2. During summer camp he was not chosen to perform in a play which lead him to feel inferior and worthless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The T experience</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3. After seeing a boy drown she developed a fear of the water.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 4-continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%a</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whom she did not like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>As a result of this she still does not trust men with premature gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( ^a \)These percentages are based on the 77 T experiences whose consequences were categorizable.
TABLE 5
Categorization of the Consequences
of the T-S Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%a</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. T-S experience resulted in an increase awareness, empathy, or deepening appreciation.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1. After the death of her father she appreciated life more and tried to live it to the fullest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. T-S experience precipitated reconstruing oneself in a more positive fashion.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2. A participant recalled that she did not have the grades necessary to remain in school. After some time she became more accepting of herself and realized she was a worthwhile person even though she didn't have a &quot;great mind.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. T-S experience resulted in a reconstruing of the</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3. During class she witnessed one of her friends being punished</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 5-continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%a</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>environment or one's behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>for shoplifting. She had also been involved in shoplifting, however, she did not get caught. After this she realized the potential consequences of her behavior and quit shoplifting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavior more realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The T-S experience       .07 4. After she made a "smart" remark to her teacher he told her he had expected her behavior to be better. As a result of this experience she tried to develop more self-control over her anger.

5. The T-S experience       .07 5. During the last game of the season, the coach forgot to put him in the game which was a customary practice for those players who didn't
TABLE 5—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%a</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the task at which one failed or an alternate task.</td>
<td></td>
<td>play during the season. This made him work harder to gain the coach's confidence so that he wouldn't be forgotten again.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. The T-S experience precipitates a secondary experience and this secondary event results in a positive gain.

6. During spring break she had to stay in the hospital because of illness. While in the hospital she lost 10 pounds. This gave her the incentive to lose more weight thus her physical appearance was improved and her self confidence increased.

These percentages are based on the 43 T-S experiences whose consequences were categorizable.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study was done as a partial replication and an extension of Finkel's research concerning the incidence and pattern of occurrence of three types of experiences in the lives of college students. The three types of experiences investigated were: traumas (T), strengthening experiences (S), and traumas that were converted into strengthening experiences (T-S). This study extended Finkel's research by investigating the incidence and pattern of occurrence of these three experiences in a sample of individuals whose ages exceeded that of Finkel's subjects.

The data indicate that there are no significant differences in the number and types of experiences recalled by males versus females or by persons of different ages, however, the data show that there are differences in the frequency with which the three types of experiences occurred over the life span.

Number and Types of Experiences

It is interesting that no significant differences are found in the number of experiences recalled by males versus females. It could be expected that females would recall more experiences than males. The rationale for this expectation stems from two sources, the differences that
exist in the culturally approved roles for males and females and the results of research on self-disclosure.

Sex roles of our culture reward males for independence, self-sufficiency, and a certain degree of toughness, while females are praised for dependency, emotionality, and a certain degree of weakness. It is more acceptable for females to share experiences since they are typically socialized toward expressive, nurturing, and succoring roles. In research on self-disclosure Jourard and Richman (1963) found that females disclosed themselves more and were disclosed to by others more than males.

The question arises as to why there are no differences found between males and females in the number of experiences recalled. It may be that under conditions of anonymity, where the social restrictions of their sex roles are minimized, males become more expressive and willing to share experiences.

Another possible explanation is related to the educational level of the participants. Research has shown that as the educational level of the individual increases there is a blending of sex role characteristics. In other words, females become more masculine and males become more feminine in their interests and in certain behaviors. The educational level of the participants is comparatively higher than that of the general population, thus the distinction between the stereotypic roles for each sex may be diminished which resulted in no differences being found.
between the sexes in the number of experiences recalled. In addition, a large number of the male participants are employed in the field of education, thus they may be more verbal due to the demands of their profession.

Another finding of this study is that there are no significant differences between males and females in the types of experiences recalled. However, when the types of experiences were analyzed separately for each sex, females recalled a significantly greater number of T's than T-S's or S's. The males in this study reported about an equal number of T's, S's, and T-S's. Finkel found that his subjects reported S's and T's with an equal frequency as was found for the males in this study. Lynch (1968) found in his research that the number of intense experiences judged as painful by his subjects were significantly greater than those judged as pleasurable. This is comparable to the findings obtained when the data from females in this study was analyzed separately for each type of experience.

The difference found in the ratio of recalled T's versus S's and T-S's between the sexes needs to be studied in future research with a larger number of male and female participants. One possible explanation could be that females actually do experience more T's than T-S's or S's in their life. Another is that males, in an effort to fulfill their sex roles, do not report T's.

If those experiences recalled which were initially perceived as traumatic but were later reconstrued as having
positive consequences (T-S) and those experiences that were recalled which remained traumatic (T) are combined, then the painful or traumatic experiences outnumber the pleasant. This way of looking at the data shows that more traumas (T's and T-S's) are recalled than S's.

The results show that the number of experiences reported by persons of different ages did not significantly differ. The average number of experiences recalled by the participants was 2.2 which is similar to 3.4, the average number of experiences recalled by Finkel's (1974) subjects. It is feasible to expect there would have been a greater number of experiences recalled by older persons than younger simply because the older persons have lived for a longer period of time thus having a larger repertoire of experiences from which to recall.

This raises the question of whether the number of experiences recalled is a function of memory, the demand characteristics of the task, or is a result of the types of experiences persons actually have. Since the participants were asked to write their responses this may have affected the number of experiences recalled because of the time and effort involved in writing. The number of experiences recalled may have also been related to the participants' perception of the requirements of the questionnaire, i.e., to recall at least one S and one T. An alternate interpretation is that most people only recall two or three experiences as having real impact on their personality and life.
As analyzed in this study the data show no significant differences in the number of S's, T's, and T-S's recalled by persons of different ages. The lack of differences in the number of S's, T's, and T-S's may be partially explained by the fact that the participants recalled only 2.2 experiences thus restricting the likelihood of finding differences. Also, the examples given in the questionnaire occurred in childhood and adolescence and this may have given the participants a mental set to recall experiences that occurred during these periods. After recalling experiences from this time in their life they discontinued recollection and did not include experiences that happened later in life. Another interpretation is that proportionally there are no actual differences in the number of S's, T's, and T-S's for persons of different ages.

The results show significant interactions between types of experiences recalled and age of occurrence. In other words, the data show that there were more T's recalled as occurring during one age period, more S's at another, and T-S's at still another.

Traumatic experiences were recalled as occurring during the earlier part of life which suggest that during this time of life an individual lacks the necessary ego strength and coping devices to deal effectively with stressful experiences. As individuals mature and their ego becomes better developed, experiences are less likely to be perceived as traumatic. Also, as one matures situations may be avoided
which in the past have had traumatic consequences. Finkel (1975) also found in his study that the larger number of T's were reported as occurring at an early age.

The frequency distribution for all the participants shows that the largest number of S experiences were reported as occurring during the developmental age period of 13-17 or early adolescence. Adolescence, as described by Erickson, involves a movement away from the childhood self defined by others to a more integrated, more autonomous, and more individuated sense of self. This finding points out that not only is this period of development a time for conflicts that result from growth and reorganization of the self, but that it also contains positive and strengthening experiences. If a person is given the necessary familial, social, and educational support, then conflicts can be minimized and those that do happen can be used as strengthening experiences.

The frequency distribution for the older participants shows that the S experiences gradually increased to reach a peak during the developmental age period from 18-21 or late adolescence. This finding also emphasizes that during adolescence persons do have positive and strengthening experiences.

More research needs to be done which investigates the variables of these S experiences that occur during adolescence. Some variables which could be investigated are: persons involved in the experience besides the participant, settings in which the experience occurs, i.e., school, home, and the
consequences of the experience. It can be hypothesized that one of the reasons the recall of S's reached a peak during adolescence is that these experiences, in a time of conflict, stood out in the individual's mind as unusual and important. Also, these strengthening experiences may have been an important source by which the new emerging self could be validated and supported.

In the frequency distribution for all participants during the first 21 years of life, there is a slight tendency for the T-S experiences to gradually increase until a peak is reached during the developmental age period of 13-17. In the frequency distribution of the older participants the T-S experiences reach another peak during the developmental age period of 22-34 and remain relatively high in the 35-49 developmental age period. In studying the incidence and pattern of occurrence of the three types of experiences in college students' lives, Finkel (1975) found the incidence of T-S experiences to increase with age. This was an interesting finding to the researcher, hence one of the reasons this study was conducted was to investigate the incidence of T-S experiences over a longer age span. Finkel's study was limited to persons from 18 to 22 years of age. One of the purposes of gathering this data was to investigate whether T-S experiences did actually increase with age and when the peak of T-S's occurred.

Since T-S experiences appear to occur later in life this may imply, as stipulated by Piaget, that with the onset
of adolescence there is an emergence of new intellectual and cognitive abilities which enables persons to consider all possible solutions to a problem and to be more rational, understanding, and empathic in their thinking. Logically these characteristics of thinking would allow for reconstruction of an experience to occur. The increase in the incidence of T-S's after the age of 22 suggests that persons have lived a sufficient period of time to acquire a repertoire of problem solving techniques and to have had a sufficient number of diverse experiences enabling them to be more rational, understanding, and empathic. Consequently, they are able to reconstrue traumatic experiences in a positive way.

Essentially, this study finds the same pattern for T's and T-S's over the lives of persons as Finkel (1975) found in his study. T's appear to occur early in life and decrease as the age and maturity of the person increases. The T-S experience seems to occur later in life and the incidence of these experiences appear to occur with greater frequency as age increases.

It is interesting to note that in the frequency distribution for the older participants the largest number of T's and S's are recalled as occurring one developmental period later than in the frequency distribution for all participants. One possible interpretation is that this is due to cohort differences. Persons born at different times may have different values, beliefs, and perceptions. Another
possible interpretation is that this is due to a function of memory, persons recall experiences which are more recent. In order to have a greater understanding of what is occurring here there needs to be a replication of the study done with a larger number of participants.

**Categorization of the Experiences According to Consequences**

While the S experiences recalled by the participants did not seem to be peak experiences as defined by Maslow (1968) or by Thorne (1968), the consequences of these experiences seem to be similar to those of peak experiences. The peak experiences and S experiences appear to be similar in that both bring about enrichment, self-knowledge, and joy. These experiences differ in the degree of intensity and effect they appear to have on the individual's life. The peak experience has a greater and more comprehensive effect on the individual's life.

The most frequent consequence of the S experience was to increase the participant's feelings of self worth and ability to cope effectively with the environment. The rationale for this statement stems from the fact that 54% of the consequences of the S experiences resulted in an increase in self-confidence and 2% resulted in an increase in self-pride, thus 56% of the S's had the consequence of improving self concept. Thirteen percent resulted in a new way of interpreting or construing a type of experience or behavior. Therefore, a total of 67% of the consequences of the S experiences involved a positive change in the attitude
toward the self or a positive change in behavior.

Twenty-nine percent of the S experiences seemed to precipitate a change or give direction to the life of the participants. These experiences are comparable to what Furest (1965) called turning point experiences and, in fact, two participants did refer to these experiences as "turning points" in their life.

When contrasted to the consequences of the S experiences, the T experiences seemed to have a different effect on the life and personality of the individual. Twenty-nine percent of the T's resulted in an impairment of self concept or functioning while 56% of the S's precipitated a change in self through increase in self confidence or pride. It seems that positive experiences have a greater tendency to change "self perceptions" than do negative experiences.

Instead of changing self perceptions the T experiences appear to have a greater tendency to effect the perception of and the interpersonal relationships with others. Fifty percent of the T experiences resulted in negative feeling, fear, or resentment that effect feelings and behaviors toward certain persons or resulted in a generalization of negative feelings to a class of people.

Similarities can be found between the categories for the consequences of the T experiences arrived at in this study and in previous research. For instance, two of McKenzie's (1967) negative categories, experience of failure and failure to conquer a problem or skill, can be placed in the
category of impairment of self concept or functioning found in this study. McKenzie also found that negative experiences recalled by his subjects involved human or interpersonal relationships. Both in this study and in Lynch's (1968) study it was found that some unpleasant or traumatic experiences seemed to involve fear, either a general fear, i.e., loneliness, as found in Lynch's study or a specific fear, i.e., phobia, as found in this study.

The T-S experiences recalled by the participants are comparable to those negative turning points experiences recalled by Furest's (1967) subjects as having positive consequences, to the bitter-sweet experiences recalled by Lynch's (1968) subjects, and to those negative experiences recalled by McKenzie's (1967) subjects as having positive effects in retrospect. The majority of the consequences of the T-S's, 59% resulted in greater awareness, empathy, or appreciation, or in reconstruing the environment or one's behavior more realistically. Twenty-six percent of T-S experiences resulted in changes toward the self which is similar to the percentage of T's that resulted in changes toward the self. Eighty-four percent of the T-S experiences seemed to involve a reconstruing of a traumatic experience, i.e., illness, death, failure, divorce, so that some of the consequences of the experience became positive in nature.

**Subjective Impressions**

While conducting this research I have formulated many subjective impressions concerning the participants, the data,
and the effect that this study has had on my life and personality. I would like to share these impressions because not only do I think they are interesting, but they could also be helpful for those who may want to conduct research in this area.

In categorizing the consequences, I was at times surprised at the impact that an event had on a participant's life and personality. What appeared objectively to be a rather insignificant experience had extensive consequences for the individual. For example, one participant recalled that her peers had made "fun of" her curly hair. This experience resulted in her being concerned about her physical appearance especially her hair for many years. Another recalled that she had been praised by her teacher in the presence of her peers which changed her attitude toward school and herself. It would seem that what determines the effect or consequence that an event will have on an individual's life is not the event per se, but the individual's interpretation and perception of the event. An interesting avenue of research to pursue would be to explore why this event at this time had the impact that it had.

The participants' reaction to and involvement in this research were many and varied. Some participants seemed to do little self-disclosing. In answering the questions included in the questionnaire they used terms from the questions which limited the amount of information given.
Other participants, not only were willing to self-disclose, but recalling the experience also seemed to be a catharsis. A substantial number of the experiences that were recalled seemed to have involved teachers, school, and peers. The interpersonal relationship that exists between teacher and pupil can do much to either enhance or retard the pupil's personal and academic growth. The magnitude of the influence of teachers and peers on the person's intellectual, social, and personal development must not be overlooked. For example, one participant recalled that a letter she had written to a friend was ridiculed by her teacher and peers. As a result of this she became fearful of sharing her emotions with others.

Certain emotions appeared to be noted more often with different types of experiences. Embarrassment and humiliation were most often associated with traumatic experiences. In S experiences, pride seemed to be felt. In T-S experiences the emotions associated with the experience appeared to be mixed, however, the participants frequently used the word, strength, endurance, and maturity in describing the effects of these experiences.

Conducting this research has heightened my awareness of older persons and the fact that change and growth continues throughout life. I have tried to personally apply the concept of the T-S experience to my own life. In other words, I have tried to use traumatic or unpleasant experiences in such a way as to promote personality growth. My goal is
to shorten the time necessary for reconstruction of a traumatic experience until reconstruction becomes automatic. In a therapeutic setting I have found this concept useful in helping others to understand that traumatic experiences may be reconstructed as having positive consequences or can be used as a learning, growing experience.

**Limitations**

As noted earlier (Chapter III) the particular sample used in the study imposes limitations on the generalizations and conclusions that can be made. The generalizations that can be made are limited by the fact that the educational level attained and occupation status held by the participants is higher than that of the general population. Also, most of the sample consisted of public school teachers or was obtained through church classes. Since the sample differs from the general population in the important attributes of educational level and occupational status, it would be inadvisable to apply these findings to a more heterogeneous population. Conclusions and implications that are reached concerning the older participants are done so tentatively because of the small sample size.

The data obtained from the participants may have been confounded by certain factors. One factor may be the unwillingness of persons to share certain experiences such as illegal acts even under conditions of anonymity. Hence, these people may have chosen not to participate and consequently biasing the sample. Another confounding factor
may be that both the examples of S and T which were given in the questionnaire occurred in the earlier part of life. This may have influenced the participants in that they recalled more experiences from this part of their life than if an example had been included that occurred during adulthood. As stated earlier, the fact that the method of data collection was to have the participants write their experience may have had an effect on the number of experiences recalled or the amount of detail given. It seemed that some participants did share positive and negative experiences from their life but it was difficult to determine how these experiences shaped their personality. Therefore, this data was limited in its usefulness.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of the present investigation suggests several opportunities for constructive changes in future research. An alternate method of data collection or a supplement to the questionnaire could be the interview. In categorizing the experiences according to consequences, it would have been helpful to interview the participants to clarify details and fill in omissions. This method of data collection would also be helpful in exploring whether the number of experiences recalled by a participant was a function of memory, the demand characteristics of the task, or a result of the types of experiences persons actually have. In addition, it would have further usefulness in that the researcher would be in a better position to tell what,
if any, effects the experience had on the participant's life and personality. It is realized that conducting research or data collection in this manner would open the study to other confounding factors such as interviewer characteristics. Before further use the questionnaire should be changed so that an example of a S or T experience that occurred during adulthood is included.

Since this is a relatively new area of investigation there are many avenues of research which can be pursued. Therefore, the following are just a few of the possible studies that could be conducted. A study could be conducted in which only older persons were used in the sample. Then conclusions concerning the frequency and the age of occurrence of S, T, and T-S experiences in the life of persons could be made with greater accuracy and certainty. The effects that the sex of the participant had on the number and types of experiences could be further explored. For example, one question that needs to be studied in greater depth is whether females do recall more T's as occurring in their lives than do males and factors or possible reasons for this difference.

There also needs to be research conducted in which the characteristics of the sample more closely match that of the general population. The incidence and age of occurrence of S, T, and T-S experiences in this sample might be somewhat different than that of the general population. It would also be interesting to conduct a longitudinal
study where these three types of experiences could be studied over the life of each participant.
### Appendix A

#### Table A

**Age Groups, Sex and Marital Status of the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Single</th>
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<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>60-69</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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Appendix B

Table B

Educational Attainment of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational attainment</th>
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<td>Completed high school</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially completed a bachelor's degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed a bachelor's degree</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially completed a master's degree</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completed a master's degree</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rank 1(^a)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
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</table>

\(^a\)A classification recognized by the Kentucky Board of Education which requires 60 semester hours approved graduate level credit including a master's degree.
### Appendix C

#### Table C

**Occupational Level of the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving room clerk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable splicer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book clerk</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electrical engineer</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
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60
Appendix D

Questionnaire

Agefrau  Sex  Phone Number
Marital Status
Last School Grade Completed

Occupation

The word "trauma" and its meaning are quite familiar to most. We can identify and articulate those experiences that have injured, in some way, our personality development.

The anthropologist Margaret Mead has pointed to a deficiency in the English language—there is no antonym for trauma—some event or experience that strengthens our personality. William Hollister has coined the word "stren" to fill the need. A stren is "an experience in an individual's life that builds strength into his personality."

The word "trauma" is "any experience that in some way harms our personality." A "stren" is any experience that in some way strengthens our personality.

I wish to find out more about strens and traumas. I would like for you to record in detail the various strens and traumas you can recall from your own life. It will become obvious that I am asking personal questions. I am not interested in learning more about the general nature of strens and traumas. Your information will be handled
in confidence, and if it is reported, all identifying materials will be deleted.

Remember, strens and traumas are subjective--what was a stren to us may not be so for someone else. Don't omit an experience because it might sound "silly" or because someone wouldn't understand. I may speak with you, individually. Please think about your strens and traumas and put them down in detail.

For each experience please give the following information. Use the outline below as a guide in describing each experience. Item number seven (7) may not be appropriate to the experience, if not do not include it.

(1) Describe the experience in detail.
(2) How old were you when it occurred?
(3) Identify significant people, i.e., friends, family members, professionals, etc., and their part and activities in the experience.
(4) What were the consequences of the experience?
(5) What ways did you and your world change?
(6) How do you evaluate it now?
(7) If your evaluation of the experience and its consequences to you has changed from your original evaluation, how long after the experience did this change in evaluation take place?

On the following page are two examples of experiences which might be labeled a stren and trauma.
A. 1. When I was in the seventh grade I was quite thin and not very good in sports. One day I was playing basketball with a bunch of my friends in the school gym and the track coach came over to me. He said I had a fine pair of legs and he'd like to encourage me to go out for track. This really did make me feel good and I went out for track and was on the track team in high school.

2. 13 years old

3. Me and the track coach

4. I went out for track and lettered in track in high school.

5. I felt better about myself as a man.

6. It was a good experience for me, gave me self confidence

7. I still feel that it was a good experience for me.

B. 1. When I was in the third grade I had a crush on a boy in my class and he had a crush on me. For several days he walked me home after school and even carried my books. I was fat at that time and some of the kids made fun of me so I was particularly thrilled that he liked me. Then he just quit having anything to do with me, and one day when the other kids were calling me "fatty" he joined in and called me "fatty" also.

It nearly broke my heart.

2. 8 years old

3. Me, several of my school mates and my boyfriend

4. It was very painful and humiliating to me.
5. I hated the other children for a while, and especially him.

6. Some how I have a slight fear that no man can ever really love me—even now.

7. It was a bad experience and I wish it hadn't happened.

Try to recall experiences in your life that either strengthened your personality, or harmed it, and record these on the attached sheets. If you have read this over and choose not to participate in this research please check here ______.

If you have thought about it and cannot recall any experiences that you would label as a trauma or a stren please check here ______.

If you simply forgot to fill out the booklet please check here ______.

Please remember that your cooperation and help is needed and greatly appreciated.
Appendix E

Introduction Given to the Participants

I would like to introduce myself to you. I am Phyllis Hatfield. I am a graduate student at Western Kentucky University and I am collecting data for my thesis. I am requesting your help in this endeavor. What I am asking you to do is fill out a booklet and describe in detail some types of experiences that all people have.

My study pertains to personality development of normal people, and is not a study of people with severe adjustment problems. It will take 15 to 50 minutes for you to complete this task. Most studies of people are limited to college populations because of their accessibility. There is a real need to study people beyond college age. This study is completely dependent on your willingness to help me in this research. So in essence I am really asking you to help me.

No effort will be made to identify any person in this study. As a matter of fact I am not even asking for your name. I will need a phone number in case I have to ask for further clarification on some of your responses.

I plan to follow up a very few cases with a personal interview pertaining to questions asked in the booklet. The reason I am using churches is that this is one of the places
where adults congregate regularly, therefore, they can be contacted.

Please return the booklets next week. The booklets are self-explanatory and I don't think you will have any questions. I plan to bring a brief summary of this study when it is completed for you to see if you are interested. I will be back next week to pick up the booklets.
Appendix F

Scoring Guidelines

for Classifying Experiences as T, S, or T-S

1. Scoring Categories

A. General Guidelines

In evaluating both the initial experience and its consequence the account of the participant is to be taken at face value, no interpretations are to be made, i.e., scorers are not to interpret a statement as a "reaction formation" or "denial". If the participant says that the experience was a positive one, it is to be taken as a positive experience.

B. Definition of Scoring Categories

1. Trauma (T) an experience that injured personality development.

2. Stren (S) an experience that strengthened produced growth in the personality.

3. Trauma-stren (T-S) an experience that was initially perceived as a trauma, but later reconstrued as a stren.

C. Nonscorable Experiences

1. The experience will be considered nonscorable if the participant does not include sufficient information to determine if the experience was a T, S, T-S.
2. The experience will also be considered nonscorable if the responses to questions 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 do not refer to any part of the responses to question one which asks the participant to describe the experience in detail.

II. Additional Guidelines

In determining what the initial or central event is, that is, the event that is to have caused the consequence to the personality, use the event that is the referent to participant's responses in questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.
Appendix G

Chi Square Values for the Interactions Between
Age of Occurrence and Types of
Experiences for the First 21 Years of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Experience</th>
<th>Developmental Age Period</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-5</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>T-S</td>
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Grand Total 24.04946
CORRECTION

PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN REFILMED TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR
Appendix G

Chi Square Values for the Interactions Between Age of Occurrence and Types of Experiences for the First 21 Years of Life

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<td>T</td>
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<tr>
<td>T-S</td>
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Grand Total 24.04946
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