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Seniors Learning Sports: A Qualitative Inquiry Regarding the Meanings in Learning and Participating in Physical Activity

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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DEDICATION

To my family

Thanks for being there, everyone.

Mom, Don, John, Lori, and Mac,

you are the best.

Mom, thanks for never

missing the milestones.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There have been a number of people who have contributed in significant ways to the personal and professional journey from which this work evolved. To all of them I would like to express my deep gratitude and heartfelt appreciation.

First, I would like to thank the five participants in my study. They shared with me themselves; their histories, insights, perspectives, voices, and time. Without their acceptance, openness, patience, and caring this project would not have been possible.

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For the special love and care he provided throughout the whole graduate school experience, I would like to thank Brad Smith. Thanks for staying up with me when I had to study, for bringing me coffee in the mornings, and for cheering me on when I needed a push. You have been incredibly understanding and supportive of my dream.

And finally, I would like to extend my utmost thanks and appreciation to all of my friends and family who not only offered their love, support, and encouragement throughout this process, but helped me laugh along the way.
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Major Emphasis: Socio-Cultural Aspects of Sport
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LATE BLOOMERS

Some have three strikes before they begin,
Being offspring of farmers or portfolios
Rather than famous first basemen,
Being allergic to competition and grass,
Being women instead of men,
Thus coming late to your lifelong joy
After biceps and metatarsal joints
Are long past reshaping,
Body and soul growing closer and closer
While body and spirit go separate ways.
Being three times past Olympic condition,
They still share your championship joy
And every day, every game, the same good intentions.

Barbara Smith
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"We must go with lanterns ahead of the owls,
sowing dreams to spurn the fears that check
our struggle for a better day".

Odia Ofeimum, Nigerian poet

There has often been a tendency to look upon teaching as simply the
transmittal of information while the formula for learning consists of rote
memorization and review. This philosophy of education implies that learning
for the student is essentially an external endeavor, dependent primarily on the
teacher’s knowledge and presentation of subject matter. However, there is far
more to the experience of knowledge acquisition. For instance, Knowles (1984)
indicated that learning is an internal process controlled by the learner, engaging
intellectual, emotional, and physiological functions. According to this
argument, the central dynamic of the learning process is the experience of the
learner, or the interaction between learner and environment. The art of teaching
is fundamentally the management of environment and interaction, which
together define the substance of the “learning experience.” The function of the
teacher, then, is to create a rich and supportive environment, and to guide interaction in ways that will maximize learning (Knowles, 1984). The mission of an educator, according to Houle (1972), is to help others increase their skill, knowledge or sensitivity toward the chosen subject matter, and "to enable men and women to enlarge and interpret their own living experience" (Hutchinson, 1963, p. 232-233). In other words, we, as teachers, need to focus not just on knowledge of subject matter, but on ways in which the transmission of that information can make the learning experience both relevant and meaningful to our students.

In considering the older learner, ideological and empirical differences in orientation to learning may call for the utilization of a different educational paradigm. Through the work of innovative teachers and researchers concerned with knowledge acquisition among mature populations, the field of adult education has been advanced. Enriched by multiple perspectives and philosophies, the scope of adult education is difficult to circumscribe. But whether the term "adult education" indicates micro or macro involvement in issues pertaining to social reform, community activism, industrial training, or recreational engagement, learning is typified by change and growth.
John Dewey wrote about learning as a transactional process. He said "active perception, interpretation, or understanding comes as a result of a transaction in which are linked the interpreter and the interpreted, the observer and the observed" (Dewey, in Kidd, 1983, p. 71). While active involvement is certainly a significant dimension of the educative undertaking, the principles of adult learning also embody exploration, discovery, and self-fulfillment. Students are encouraged to utilize their own experiences as resources that add meaning and relevance to their continuing education. Ideally, learners should share in the responsibility for what and how they learn and should be expected to participate in the process.

Knowles (1984) acknowledged that methods which involve the individual most deeply in self-directed inquiry would produce the greatest learning. He stated that the thrust of modern adult educational technology should be concerned with creating techniques that involve adults in self-diagnosis of learning needs, formulating objectives for learning, designing and performing educational activities and in evaluating their own progress (Knowles, in Tight, 1983). Knowles (1984) believed that a separate and distinct ideology of teaching is necessary for adults because they learn differently than children. This is due to the fact that adults have more life experience than children; they
are more autonomous, and are interested primarily in improving their life situations (Knowles, 1990). These suppositions formulate the groundwork for the body of knowledge known as humanistic adult education.

While efforts have been made to study the educative needs of adults, intersections linking adult learning theory, meaning, and the learning of physical activity among an older population have not been investigated. This is surprising, given that participation in physical activity and exercise programs is currently accepted as beneficial to the physical and mental health of most individuals throughout the life cycle (Berger, 1989; Biddle & Smith, 1991; Duda, 1991) In fact, correlations between physical activity and life satisfaction have been described as impressively high (Berger, 1989). Additionally, some researchers report that older people who are physically active tend to have more positive attitudes toward work, are in better health, proclaim more stamina, and indicate a greater ability to cope with stress and tension (Heinzelman & Bagley, 1970; Schaie & Geiwitz, 1982). Successful participation in any sport or physical activity implies cognitive involvement with respect to skill and strategy acquisition. Hence, ways in which seniors learn sport is an area of inquiry which deserves further consideration.
One explanation for the deficiency of information regarding the learning of physical activity among older individuals could be that until recently, active involvement in sport was not perceived or promoted as an adult activity. In fact, throughout much of this country's history, many forms of leisure were viewed as childish and considered inappropriate and a waste of time for adults (Ostrow, 1984). The stereotypical depiction of the elderly as frail and debilitated still exists, even though it is appropriate for less than 5 percent of the older adult population (Gandee, Campbell, Knierim, Cosky, Leslie, Ziegler, & Snodgrass, 1989). A result of the popular mythology associated with aging has been that older adults are not expected to stay physically active. Unfortunately, this misconception can lead to early physical declivity. As Duda (1991) explained, "the declines associated with "old age" are typically seen as inevitable and attributed to the natural aging process and/or presence of disease or illness. In many cases, however, the observed decrements in physical health among older people are a function of poor health habits and, in particular, inadequate levels of physical activity" (Duda, 1991, p. 44).

Currently, the United States has more older people than previous generations, and views regarding the capabilities of mature populations are beginning to change. Scientific studies have found that exercise and fitness are
important aspects of maintaining and improving corporal and mental health, and that adults can learn and participate in a wide variety of physically active leisure and sporting pursuits well into their later years (McPherson, Curtis & Loy, 1989).

**An Aging Population**

As our population ages, focusing on educational issues as they relate to the health and recreative needs of older adults is becoming an increasingly important issue. Current demographic movements in the United States indicate a continuing growth in the numbers of older adults. From 1900 to 1980, average life expectancy jumped from 47 to 73 years. Research has shown that the 65-and-older cohort grew twice as fast as the rest of the population during the last two decades (Berger, 1989; Brown, Cundiff, & Thompson, 1989). It is estimated that by the year 2000 Americans over the age of 65 will make up 12% of the population, and that this may increase to approximately 20% by the year 2030 (Berger, 1989). This so-called "graying of America" has serious societal implications, affecting quality of life issues as human longevity is positively influenced by nutritional, technological and medical advances. While it is generally agreed that "aging well" is related to both exercising and keeping up with social activities that contribute toward maintaining a healthy lifestyle, it is
often true that the expectation for older adults is that they will become increasingly sedentary. Despite the plethora of information regarding the health benefits of exercise and physical activity, relatively few older adults initiate or sustain involvement in these behaviors (Biddle & Smith, 1991).

**Disuse Theory**

Some of the current research suggests that much of the decline frequently attributed to physiological aging is, in reality, disuse atrophy resulting from inactivity (Pollock, 1989; Shephard, 1986; White & Rosenberg, 1985). Exercise, plus healthful dietary and living habits decrease the physical burdens of aging, enhance psychological and emotional well-being while increasing the likelihood of living to one's full life expectancy. Although it has been recognized that the aging process is not completely understood due to complex interactions among physiological, psychological, and social factors, physical activity may positively affect all three dimensions. Therefore, it becomes difficult to distinguish between decreases in physical abilities resulting from physical inactivity and those resulting from the aging process itself. Physical decline from a lack of exercise might result from the belief that one is too old to exercise because it might be harmful to one's health, inappropriate for one's age, or both. As a result, the person may incorporate
the feeling of being old in her or his self-concept and participate even less in physical activity (Berger, 1989).

**Age Grading**

The adage "act your age" greatly deters adult participation in physical activity. According to Ostrow, Jones, and Spiker (1981), people exercise less as they age because of the social-psychological process of age grading. This conception stereotypes people according to their chronological years, and is learned early in life. Ostrow et al. (1981) found that even preschool children have reported that exercise is less appropriate for older people. Unfortunately, these attitudes serve to discourage older adults from responding actively to their increased need to exercise. By exercising regularly, the elderly can increase their flexibility, muscle strength and endurance, aerobic capacity, balance, and agility (Ostrow, 1984).

**Psychological Health**

Some researchers have indicated that there is a positive relationship between physical functioning and psychological well-being throughout the adult life span (Berger, 1989; McPherson, 1986). Among the elderly, individuals who have good mental health tend to be physically active. In addition, physical
activity has also been associated with both optimum health and longevity. According to Schaie and Geiwitz (1982), exercise definitely can play an important role in the lives of the elderly. Some of these ways include physiological aspects such as enhanced muscular strength, increased cardiovascular efficiency, decreased blood pressure, and the slowing of osteoporosis. Also, involvement with physical activities may help retired individuals replace the role of worker and increase their socialization with others. Because exercise has been associated with mood enhancement, physical activity can be particularly important for individuals who have lost their life companion (Schaie & Geiwitz, 1982). Additionally, a variety of studies support the likelihood that physical activity in older people is associated with desirable personality characteristics, life satisfaction, mental health, and stress reduction. In fact, a study by Rosenberg (1986) suggested that adults who exercise regularly tend to have healthier personality traits than do the sedentary. Older people who are physically active are inclined to have more positive attitudes toward work, maintain better health, report more stamina, show a greater ability to cope with stress and tension, and indicate a greater degree of avowed happiness (Rosenberg, 1986).
Physical activity has also been associated with life satisfaction by enhancing body image and increasing feelings of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, the belief that one is capable of performing a variety of tasks, denotes feelings of competency and power. This is an important construct for all people, but particularly for older adults who often underestimate their physical abilities because of widespread ageism in American society (Hogan & Santomier, 1984).

As the literature suggests, physical activity for seniors is important because of the accompanying psychological and physiological benefits. Not only does exercise seem to enhance vigor and bodily health, but it appears to affect happiness and life satisfaction as well. The importance and need to increase seniors' positive sense of themselves through a heightened body image and feelings of self-esteem is well-worth the effort made to create appropriate, meaningful learning opportunities for older adults to engage in physical activity through sport skill acquisition.

Statement of the Problem

Generally speaking, the efforts of physical education programs have been aimed more toward strategies of effecting change among children and adolescent populations than responding to the needs of adults (Brown, Cundiff, & Thompson, 1989). However, there is increasing evidence that
physical activity may deter the incidence and progression of chronic diseases (e.g., coronary artery disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus) related to the aging process (Brown, Cundiff, & Thompson, 1989). In addition, participation in physical activity may strengthen a sense of personal meaning, enhancing the mental health of older adults by contributing to a positive sense of self and overall life satisfaction (Berger, 1989). This is due in part to the fact that participation in athletic activities usually includes social involvement with others, the establishment of an athletic identity, and feelings of increased self-worth (Glasser, 1992). Since most people, regardless of age, value companionship, friendship, recognition, respect, and a feeling of belonging, participation in physical activities may heighten a sense of meaning. In light of the fact that physical activity appears to reduce physiological deterioration while advancing a positive sense of personal meaning, it is clear that efforts are needed to promote physical activity among senior citizens.

Currently, research findings suggest that relatively few adults maintain involvement in exercise behaviors. Estimates indicate that less than 20% of the adult population in North America and Great Britain participate regularly in fitness enhancing activities, and of those enrolled in a supervised exercise program, 50% cease participation within six months (Biddle & Smith, 1991;
Dishman, 1982; Fenner, 1987; Stephens, Jacobs, & White, 1985). In view of these disturbing discoveries, it is important to further our comprehension of the issues affecting the way older adults perceive physical activity. By understanding the interpreted meaning of sport education and participation, perhaps we can augment the motivational factors which contribute toward keeping this segment of the population actively learning and engaging in physical activity.

**Purpose of the Study**

It is evident that because of our ever-growing population of older adults, measures need to be taken to better serve their expanding physical and educational needs. In order to accomplish this end it is necessary to understand both the ways in which mature individuals learn best, and the meanings they construct from the educative and participative process. This means analyzing learning theory, personal meaning, and teaching methodologies within the context of a sport setting. However, there has been a dearth of research integrating the isolated fields of physical activity, adult learning theory, and the development of personal meaning. This study was meant to fill in some of these theoretical gaps.
This investigation was exploratory and descriptive in nature. It was concerned with examining the phenomena of learning and meaning among older adults within the context of sport and physical activity. The acquisition of sport skills was examined according to principles of adult education in order to understand the impact these philosophies may have on the learning process. The andragogical tenets that were analyzed are based on Knowles (1990) ideological conception of adult learning. His philosophy was grounded in five assumptions which distinguish adult-centered learning from a more child-centered orientation. These assumptions include: (a) a need to know why the information is important, (b) a need to be recognized as a fully capable adult, (c) a need to intersect learning with life experience, (d) a desire to learn that which may improve life situations, and (e) an approach to learning that is life-centered rather than subject-centered (Knowles, 1990). The purpose of this study was twofold; first, to examine and describe the issues that influence the meaning and relevance participating in physical activity can have for a mature population, and second, to explore the value of Knowles' andragogical assumptions as they pertain to older adults learning sport skills.
Major Research Questions

In order to address this research problem these questions were used to guide the study:

1. What do older adults find meaningful about their participation in physical activity?
2. What factors positively contribute to the learning process?
3. Are the assumptions of andragogy pertinent to learning physical activity among an older adult population?

Significance of the Study

Adult educators believe that remaining active and interested in life-long learning promotes longevity, and is a positive factor in stimulating intellectual growth and development (Bergevin, 1967). Moreover, some feel that in order to fulfill the significant role of responsible citizen, it is critical that adults continue to learn and remain actively involved in the life of their communities (Boggs, 1991). To do so, we must first take care of our physical health. According to the tenets of both physical educators and adult educators, people should attempt to remain active on a bodily and intellectual plane all of their lives. Myths relating to the frailty of all older people are being overturned, and ageist stereotypes regarding mature individuals as necessarily sedentary are being
dispelled. Still, there is a need for investigations which focus on the transmission of physical skills and the underlying issues pertaining to the reasons people learn and continue to engage in physical activity. Insight into the relevance older adults place on the learning of sport skills may provide educators and service providers with a sense of what may be more effective strategies for teaching physical activities. If, as has been assumed, physical exercise contributes to the quality of life by enhancing both the psychological and physiological health of individuals throughout the life span, then understanding the significant factors that contribute to learning physical skills while creating a positive sense of meaning and value must be a worthwhile pursuit.

**Limitations**

This investigation explored intersections between andragogical learning theory, physical activity, and the evolvement of meaning among older adults. For this inquiry, a multiple case study design was employed. Since a qualitative methodological paradigm is often utilized to understand and describe subjective and experiential aspects of a phenomena, usually focusing on depth rather than breadth, a relatively small number of participants were asked to engage in this study. Because the intent was to work with a particular group of individuals
not necessarily typical or representative of a larger population, the findings of this inquiry are not meant to be viewed as generalizable to all older adults. Instead, this study gathered descriptive data that may contribute to greater understanding concerning the largely unexplored reasons older people learn physical activity, and defined ways in which educators can transform the instructive process of teaching sport into a worthwhile, relevant, and meaningful experience for a mature population.

**Delimitations**

This study did not attempt to measure level of skill performance nor define degrees of accomplishment, but was delimited by a specific focus on the intrinsic experiences of older adults learning physical activity. Further, this study was delimited by choice of settings. In this investigation, a tennis club, a metropolitan park, and the surrounding facilities were used as locations from which data was collected. In addition, data was gathered at the senior center and homes of the particular individuals involved in this inquiry. These sites were selected not for their typicality, but for the fact that well-established physical activity educational programs had been identified. In addition, the locations chosen for data collection were a reflection of the access and insider
status this researcher developed at one senior center, based on previous work and preliminary investigations.

The decision to utilize what may or may not be average or typical sites is supported by Schoefield (1990), who argued that while portraying the typical is worthwhile, so is the studying of potential future scenarios. "Studying what may be refers to designing studies so that their fit with future trends and issues is maximized. Techniques suggested for studying what may be include seeking out sites in which one can study situations likely to become more common with the passage of time, and paying close attention to how such present instances of future practices are likely to differ from their future realizations" (Schoefield, 1990, p. 226). With regard to Schoefield's comments, this study explored and described learning situations which, in the future, are likely to become much more common. This is due to the fact that older adult populations continue to increase. As this occurs there may be a societal shift in expectations and stereotypes of the elderly. At this point older individuals may be less affected by ageist constraints. It can be anticipated, therefore, that demand for meaningful physical activity and sport opportunities will exponentially flourish. By choosing settings and participants that may not necessarily be considered
typical or representative of our larger population, this study intentionally focused on the "what may be" scenario.

**Definition of Terms**

The following section contains definitions of the major terms. They are intended to provide the reader with an understanding of the terminology that is used throughout this document.

**Adult.** Knowles (1980) explains that this is a person who has entered into social roles considered by the culture to be adult, such as employee, spouse, parent, or responsible citizen. Further, an adult is one who perceives oneself to be responsible for one's own life or is perceived to be an adult by society (Rogers, 1986).

**Andragogy.** The emergence of this term evolved from the Greek words "pedagogy", the art and science of teaching children, and "andro", meaning adult. The term was coined in 1833 by Alexander Kapp, a German teacher who used it to describe the educational theory of Plato (Davenport & Davenport, 1985). Finding discomfort with the phrase and philosophy of "the pedagogy of adult education," Malcolm Knowles (1970) reintroduced the term "andragogy" to signify methodology differences appropriate for the teaching of adults.
Learner. An individual who engages in the process of constructing knowledge. Smith (1982) indicates that “learning” can mean acquisition and mastery, extension and clarification of knowledge, or application of new ideas to new situations. The concept of learning can be used to describe a product, a process, or a function (Smith, 1982). The process of how and why adults learn physical activity was the focus of this study.

Older Adult. The concept of “aging” is, I believe, largely a socially constructed abstraction which we, to varying degrees, internalize and live by, measuring our behaviors against what we think are the stereotypical standards for each particular age category. However, according to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), an older, or “mature adult”, is a person who has reached the age of 55. Their definition was used in this study. Also, since “senior centers” take as members anyone in the 55 and older age category, the word “senior” also delineates an “older adult”, and vice versa. This is also the case for the term “mature adult”.

Meaning. Postman and Weingartner (1969) state that “we do not ‘get’ meaning from things, we assign meaning . . . the meaning we assign is a function of the pattern or system of symbols through which we order and relate whatever we are dealing with” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 99). The
development of meaning, relevance, or value, then, is the process each individual initiates to meaningfully connect the patterns and symbols in her or his world.

**Physical Activity.** For the purposes of the current investigation, this term has been adapted from the literature to refer to freely chosen, life-time sport skills such as tennis, golf, bowling, and swimming (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1994; Henderson, Uhlir, & Greer, 1990). Although physical activity can encompass skilled performance and movement literacy, it is not necessarily related to elite athleticism (Bennett, Whitaker, Smith, & Sablove, 1987). According to Therbarge (1987), the term physical recreation (in this case physical activity) offers the potential for empowerment through involvement without subjection to the competition and domination which are commonly reproduced through sport.

**Overview of the Chapters**

The following chapters document this investigation. Chapter I included background information and theoretical grounding, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, questions guiding the investigation, an overview of methodology and research design, a description of the setting and participants, and definitions of terms.
Chapter II provided a theoretical framework through a review of the literature. This chapter discussed the bodies of knowledge pertaining to andragogical methodologies, physical activity, and the development of meaning through learning sport skills.

Chapter III, "Methodology," addressed the qualitative methodological techniques and research design that was employed in this study. It referred to selection of the participants, data collection, analysis, and issues relating to validity, generalizability, and trustworthiness.

Chapter IV, "Data Stories," illustrated particular themes as they emerged throughout progression of this study. Each narrative account told the partial story of a participant. These accounts were followed by a discussion of similar strands as they developed into patterns more broadly applicable to the experiences of all participants in educational programs of physical activity.

Chapter V, "Conclusions and Implications," summarized the findings of the study, linked data to the research literature, addressed relevant issues raised by the investigation, and discussed implications for possible applications and future challenges.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The creation and enhancement of meaning is the fundamental concern of education.

Ann Jewett, Professor

Introduction

Due to our expanding population of older adults, the necessity of understanding the multilayered reality of how this population learns has become increasingly relevant. Also significant is discovering the meaning older people attribute to their participation in physical activity and sport. This chapter presented a review of the literature as it pertains to the investigation of older adult learners and their development of meaning through physical activity. The following sections are included: (a) aging and intelligence, (b) the construct of learning, (c) the adult learner, (d) an interpretation of andragogy, (e) physical activity among older populations, and (f) personal meaning within the sport and leisure experience.
Aging and Intelligence

According to Peterson (1983), much has been written about the natural changes that occur to the human organism throughout the aging process. Many of these studies focus on the issues of memory and intelligence, and the cognitive fluctuations that may take place as we grow older (Labouvie-Vief, 1980; Lohman & Scheurman, 1992; Peterson, 1983). However, because the construct of "intelligence" is so difficult to isolate and define, there is no absolute conclusion as to how to adequately measure it. Nevertheless, there are viable theories concerning the relationship between intelligence, memory, and the aging process.

It is popularly accepted that increased age is associated with a decreased aptitude for learning. Despite societal stereotypes concerning older people and their cognitive abilities, chronological age alone is an insufficient indicator for estimating intelligence (Botwinick, 1978). Other, and perhaps more important, influencing factors on intelligence among older adults are socioeconomic status, level of education, and cohort membership. Further factors include level of health and energy. In addition, there are two different types of intelligence, fluid and crystallized, which must be understood before any conclusions regarding the intelligence of older adults can be made (Peterson, 1983).
According to the literature (Denny, 1994; Labouvie-Vief, 1980; Lohman & Scheurman, 1992; Peterson, 1983), crystallized intelligence is related to sociological influences, and can increase throughout the life course. This form of cognition is associated with vocabulary, reason, verbal skills, general information, and number facility. It can be influenced by educational level, travel, sociocultural status, and social interactions. The amount a person learns, the diversity and complexity of the environment, the openness to new experiences and information, and extent of past formal learning opportunities are likely to be influential in contributing to this construct. Given opportunities for learning and mental stimulation, this form of intelligence continues to increase throughout life (Labouvie-Vief, 1980).

Fluid intelligence, on the other hand, is associated with genetic endowment, and considered to be neuro-physiological in nature. It is assumed to decline with age. Fluid intelligence is described as the ability to perceive complex relationships, deal with abstract problems, use the short-term memory, and create new concepts. It is considered to be independent of instruction or environment. A small decline in this ability is said to take place during middle age, but continues throughout the rest of the life course (Labouvie-Vief, 1980).
Peterson (1983) suggested that there is a classic pattern relating to intelligence over the life span. According to his theory, verbal abilities remain stable until the late 60s and 70s, then decline slowly. Performance and IQ scores may also decrease gradually, but this may be due less to cognitive factors than to biased methodologies and measures. Peterson believed that individuals at age 60 are at the peak of their learning aptitude, and by age 80 their performance can still be at least 70% of what it was at age 25. As a rule of thumb, people who perform well when they are younger also perform well when older. However, retrieval of information may be slower. For that reason, timed tests may put older adults at a disadvantage. Also, this type of testing procedure may increase the level of stress within the individual, leading to discouragement and fatigue. In addition, older people perform better when they feel that the material to be learned is meaningful and relevant to them. A lack of motivation for tasks that do not meet this criteria (e.g., standardized tests or laboratory experiments) may negatively influence their scores. Therefore, IQ tests may be of limited usefulness in assessing the learning capacity of older adults (Peterson, 1983).

An understanding of aging, intelligence, and memory has important ramifications for planning educational programs for an older adult population.
Some of the considerations relating to these constructs pertain to the way in which the instructor may need to present materials and structure the learning environment. For instance, many older people have little confidence in their ability to learn new things. It is the teacher's obligation to create a non-threatening learning environment that establishes a feeling of safety and puts the learners at ease as much as possible. The physical needs of the students should also be taken into consideration. Breaks allowing for rest and refreshment should be built into the learning sessions. Comfortable chairs should be available, the room should be well lit and the temperature regulated. The health and physical capabilities of the participants need to be evaluated to determine the activities the instructor will incorporate into each lesson plan. Also, because older learners do less well with timed or hurried educational situations, the teacher should promote self-pacing among the participants. Not all older people see or hear well, thus the teacher must remember to speak slowly, and present clear visuals (Peterson, 1983).

To increase the level of motivation, the teacher could involve students in planning sessions, giving them ownership over the content and structure of their own learning. This should increase the level of meaning and relevance of the subject matter for the students. Also, older persons could be encouraged
to draw upon their past experiences and skills when presented with new problems (Knowles, 1990). By utilizing crystallized intelligence, the students may be better able to relate new information to old concepts. These are several ways in which by understanding the theory of intelligence and aging, the process and meaning of education for older adults can be enhanced.

The Construct of Learning

Learning can be viewed as an aggregated activity, adding to manual and intellectual skills and affecting factual knowledge and understanding. In addition, learning may also modify or transform attitudes, values, and beliefs. While some learning experiences are formal, other types of learning can be viewed as nonformal or self-directed. In self-directed learning, the learner controls both the means and the objectives (Cole, 1988).

Many meanings exist for the terms "learning" and "learner". However, in some ways, the words are dynamic enough to defy definition. For instance, Kidd (1959) concedes that learning results in certain kinds of changes, but questions whether the process of change is similar enough to classify without ambiguity. Others have developed more concrete definitions. For example, it has been pointed out that learning is concerned with the acquisition of habits, knowledge, and attitudes, enabling the individual to make both personal and
social adjustments (Crow & Crow, 1963). Smith (1982) augments this interpretation by explaining that “learning” can mean acquisition and mastery, extension and clarification of knowledge, or application of new ideas to new situations. The term “learning” can be used to describe a product, a process, or a function (Smith, 1982). This philosophy outlines multiple dimensions to the concept of learning. As a “product”, the outcome element of the learning experience is emphasized. However, the “process” of learning highlights what happens during the course of the learning endeavor, and the “function” underscores critical aspects of learning such as motivation, retention, and transfer. In short, learning results in behavioral change (Smith, 1982).

Bruner (1985) wrote that because learning itself is a private act, it is difficult to describe or understand fully. Though a continuous process basic to human existence, the act of learning is not necessarily a passive activity. Instead, it is a dynamic process of acquiring and creating new skills, knowledge, and values and incorporating them into both thought and action.

Finally, Cole (1988) asserts there is no simplistic definition of learning because it is characterized by change, growth, and newness. While part of what it means to learn emphasizes the accumulation of information, another part accentuates discovery and the development of a personal meaning for that
information. Cole goes on to state that "learning is a complex, active process that takes place on different levels. It includes something that occurs in the brain when one encounters new facts or experiences, an internal occurrence that produces behavioral change, a developing of what we retain in our memories, and an alteration of our outlooks, attitudes, and expectations" (Cole, 1988, p. 3).

The Adult Learner

John Dewey may have set the stage for what would become the philosophy of adult education with its focus on the learner's experience, expression, involvement, and individuality. Contrasted from the tenets of traditional education with its concentration on discipline, texts, and teachers, Dewey (1938) advocated learning as an independent, free activity which prepares students to meet the challenges of an ever-evolving world. His work, among others, inspired a new awareness of the older learner.

Early investigations in the field of adult education attempted to uncover characteristics which typified the adult learner. In his study on the meaning adults found in education, Cyril O. Houle (1961) was able to identify three types of learners: (a) the goal-oriented learner who uses education to accomplish an objective, (b) the activity-oriented learner who primarily seeks social contact
and activity, and (c) the learning-oriented student who seeks knowledge for knowledge's sake.

Researchers and educators have sought understanding with regard to the mature learner. In his seminal work concerning the education of adults, Paul Bergevin (1967) discussed the importance of lifelong learning. He explained that the quality of a society will not usually exceed the educational level of the adults who run it (Bergevin, 1967). Therefore, it is critical to society that adults continue the learning process. According to this author, adult learning programs prepared to meet human needs play an important role in successfully exploiting learning potential, making it possible for people to become truly mature individuals (Bergevin, 1967).

Bergevin's philosophy of adult education recognized the value of preserving the uniqueness of individuals and groups within a disciplined social context. He explained that we must learn to feel responsible for the success of the learning adventure by becoming involved in the dynamics of the learning process. This philosophy of adult education pointed towards the use of learning for the development of free, creative, and responsible persons. Consequently he wrote, "if we are to realize our potential, the adult learning process must become a creating, releasing experience rather than a dulling
series of passively attended exercises. Adult education is designed to help people in the different facets of their lives, including political, vocational, cultural, spiritual, and physical” (Bergevin, 1967, p. 69).

Bruner (1985) discussed differences in the ways in which individuals learn. These variances have resulted in distinct learning theories. Accordingly, he wrote that there are three major theories of learning; the behaviorist, the cognitivist, and the humanist. Bruner (1985) stated that the behaviorist identifies individuals as organisms acting as a result of stimuli originating in the external environment. Cognitivists emphasize discovery and the processing of information, and concern themselves with conceptualization, problem solving, perception, and mapping. The humanists, then, focus on self-actualization. Emphasis is on experiencing, reflecting, and choosing (Bruner, 1985). Learning styles relate to the different ways in which people respond in learning situations. Individual personality differences influence how and what one learns best. These differences have significant implications for how people learn. Persons can be at a disadvantage in instructional settings in which their learning styles are not taken into account. Many experts have concluded that learning is more effective when the educational method and the learner's ability and cognitive styles are congruent (Bruner, 1985).
Malcolm Knowles emphasized a more individual freedom of the learner and the relationship to effective education (Boyer, 1984). One of the popular adult learning theories, andragogical education, is advanced by Knowles (1970). According to this approach, as a person matures his or her self-concept changes from dependency to increasing self-directedness. A reservoir of experience accumulates which provides an individual with a broadening base in which to relate new learnings. An adult's readiness to learn is increasingly the product of tasks required for his or her social roles. Adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning. Knowles' philosophy of learning is based upon five assumptions that distinguish adult learning from a more child-centered pedagogy. These include: (a) a need to know why the material is important, (b) a need to be regarded as a responsible, decision-making adult, (c) a need to connect the educational activity to their own life experience, (d) a readiness to learn that which may help them cope more effectively with their life situations, and (e) an orientation to education that is life-centered, rather than subject-centered (Knowles, 1990).

One of the more recent adult learning theories to emerge is called "perspective transformation" by Jack Mezirow (1981). He asserted adults possess three primary cognitive interests: the technical, the practical, and the
emancipatory. The first domain is task-related and focuses on work. The second embraces interpersonal understanding and the third involves perspective transformation. This later term refers to the process by which we become critically aware of how and why the structure of all our assumptions come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships. At some critical point, new learning is not just added to what one already knows but it transforms existing knowledge into a new perspective, one that "emancipates" us. Through perspective transformation we recognize to what extent we are dependent on our past and on the cultural constraints which prevent us from being truly free. The highest kind of learning, in Mezirow's opinion, is that which permits us to learn how we are caught in our own history and are reliving it (Mezirow, 1981).

In their book on the practice of adult education, Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) utilize adult learning theory to advance five categories with the aims and purposes of this field. These groupings include one referred to as "the cultivation of the intellect", whereby education is seen as a neutral activity void of social action. A traditional view of the teacher/student relationship characterizes this perspective. A second category is called "personal development". Educators with this philosophy see learning as associated with
individual growth and development. Society will be benefited by individuals’ improvement. With this approach, the student learns through experimentation and discovery while the teacher serves as the facilitator. Another category is called “progressive”, and is associated with personal development, social reform and reconstruction. Life situations and problem-solving techniques are used, and the teacher and students work together to achieve goals. The fourth category is called “social transformation”. This view encourages radical social change through reflective thought and action. The teacher is seen as a learner, and the end result should be political change. The last category is called “organizational effectiveness”, and is designed to achieve the goals of organizations. The objective is to engage employees in training and education that will benefit the organization’s needs (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

Although the major adult learning theories differ, they have important common characteristics. The first one is that the approach to learning must take into consideration the characteristics of the learner. The main focus in current learning theories is on the learner, not the teacher, on learning not on education, and on the importance of process, not content. While the traditional view has been to focus on the teacher or on the instructional material, the current emphasis is on facilitating relevant learning.
The second common characteristic is that adults are, for the most part, pragmatic learners. They respond to learning experiences more readily when they perceive their relevance and practical application. Adults prefer to actively participate in decisions and objectives that affect their learning. Many of them prefer self-directed study, and learn most effectively when they can proceed at their own pace. Most prefer some interactive learning experiences such as discussion rather than a passive, lecture-oriented experience. Teaching methods which stimulate the widest variety of senses will generally be the most effective. Oftentimes with adults, group learning is more effective than individual learning. Therefore, instructional techniques based on group participation are more effective than those which deal with individuals as isolated persons.

**An Interpretation of Andragogy**

Malcolm Knowles (1984) made the case that the adult learner has been neglected through a primary interest in the end results of learning rather than its processes and means. Believing that just one theoretical framework for the education of all was inappropriate and inadequate, he championed an orientation toward teaching and learning directed specifically toward the education of the adult student. Andragogy, clarified by Knowles (1970) as the
art and science of helping adults learn, was introduced to the United States in 1927. The concept waited over 40 years for widespread recognition (Davenport & Davenport, 1985). Knowles' ideology was based upon five assumptions which distinguish adult learning from childhood learning. These assumptions are: (a) as people mature their self-concepts move from dependency toward self-direction, (b) maturity brings an accumulating reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly important resource for learning, (c) maturity creates a readiness to learn that is increasingly oriented toward social roles, (d) as people mature the orientation towards learning becomes less subject-centered and increasingly problem-centered, and (e) mature individuals need to know why the information is important (Davenport & Davenport, 1985).

While andragogical approaches became commonly employed within such variegated fields as adult education, nursing, social work, business, religion, agriculture, and law, this philosophical orientation has had its opponents. For instance, Cyril Houle (1972) rejected andragogy as an organizing principle in adult education, preferring to view education as a single fundamental human process. Jack London (1973) agreed with Houle, opposing a dichotomous educational perspective (Davenport & Davenport, 1985). Later Houle (1984) made the point that self-directed study has always been a
paramount means of learning, but that it is constantly being rediscovered (Caffarella & O’Donnell, 1987).

In the late 1970s, Leon McKenzie (1977) argued that disagreements in terminology existed because adult educators had different philosophical orientations. Elias (1979) supported the earlier arguments of Houle (1972) and London (1973) and argued that the general concept of education was adequate for both adults and children, hence eliminating the need for separate terms. Knowles’ (1980) explained that he did not view andragogy and pedagogy at opposite ends of an educational continuum. He stated that he regarded andragogy more as a technique than a fully developed theory of adult education (Knowles, in Davenport & Davenport, 1985). Knowles concluded:

So I am not saying that pedagogy is for children and andragogy is for adults, since some pedagogical assumptions are realistic for adults in some situations and some andragogical assumptions are realistic for children in some situations. And I am certainly not saying that pedagogy is bad and andragogy is good; each is appropriate given the relevant assumptions (Knowles, 1980, p. 52).

Physical Activity Among Older Populations

Age serves as an important criterion for access to certain roles, for opportunities and expectations, and obtaining or relinquishing status and power (McPherson, Curtis, & Loy, 1989). According to these researchers,
"every society has an age structure that is based on both chronological age and the social meaning attached to the various levels of the life cycle" (McPherson, et al, p. 234-235). Today, the aging process is viewed as a seven staged system, including infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, the young-old, and the old-old (McPherson, 1983).

While the construct of age serves as an important parameter in society, "often the perceived social meaning or norms attached to a particular chronological age or stage in life has more bearing on the individual than the age itself" (McPherson, et al, 1989, p. 236). With regard to the aging process, behavioral expectations often lead to stereotypes, which solidify and magnify differences among age groups. These expectations serve as a form of social control by defining socially appropriate behavior. However, many of these "norms" can be viewed as prescriptive.

Scientific evidence now indicates that persons in every age strata can engage in sport and physical activity (Harootyan, 1982; McPherson, 1983). Yet Snyder (1980) has shown there is rapid disengagement from the sport experience among middle aged and older individuals (Snyder, 1980). Part of this disengagement can be attributed to age discrimination. As people grow older they sometimes lose prestige, recognition and status, and often accept the
concept that they should "act their age" (Snyder & Sprietzer, 1983). Although largely undocumented, withdrawal from sport and physical activity as an older adult may have resulting negative psychological and physiological ramifications.

Snyder and Spreitzer (1989) suggested that most research on physical activity focuses on children and adolescents. Yet, practitioners continue to promote the idea of lifetime health and physical fitness. Therefore, these researchers developed five constructs which they feel enhance lifetime commitments to sport. These include: (a) discovering intrinsic enjoyment, and the pleasure, fun and pure joy that is gained from physical movement, (b) the anticipation of extrinsic rewards such as prestige, recognition, trophies, victories, pride, health, and money that are associated with the activity, (c) satisfaction emanating from approval by significant others, (D) the avoidance of negative factors such as the loss of status, failure, and embarrassment which might pose a threat to one's persona, and (e) developing a commitment resulting from a close, personal identification with the sporting world (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989).

Interestingly, investigations have shown an association between leisure activity patterns and life satisfaction of older adults (Kelly, Steinkamp, & Kelly,
According to McPherson (1990), there should be an even greater focus on older age cohorts because after retirement, leisure becomes an increasingly meaningful aspect of life. Achieving meaning through physical activity contributes to what is termed “successful” aging (McPherson, 1990). Yet, the variables related to exercise behavior and life satisfaction among older adults are poorly understood (Tappe & Duda, 1988).

Some of these variables may be related to the learning climate. As Cousins and Burgess (1992) relate, “the creation of a learning climate that encourages and rewards individual striving and at the same time provides technical support upon request is a departure from traditional experiences for many older adults” (Cousins & Burgess, 1992, p. 474). These researchers found that because of their maturity older individuals have a wider perspective from which to view athletic achievement. Their orientation, therefore, may be extended toward other facets of the sport experience, including meeting others and “sharing the moment”. According to some researchers, successful older adult athletic events are marked by opportunities for socialization (Cousins & Burgess, 1992).
Personal Meaning

Over the years the search for meaning has received increased attention in the physical education literature. Though difficult to define, personal meaning in sport can be understood as an abstraction useful for examining specific values relating to attitudes and feelings regarding participation in recreational pursuits. This construct can also be employed to identify motivational attitudes of those who choose to engage in sport activities. Because of its multiple and varied perspectives, personal meaning in sport and physical activity may refer to such intrinsic feelings as joy, pleasure, and satisfaction inherent in the movement experience itself. Or, it may pertain to the process of utilizing movement to accomplish an extrinsic goal important to the participant (Jewett & Bain, 1985).

Researchers have sought to understand why individuals choose to participate in certain activities, and to determine what role personal meaning plays in these decisions (Battista, 1988; Synder & Spreitzer, 1989; Walker, 1989). Harris (1973) alluded to the relevance regarding an examination of this construct, noting that "the literature abounds in studies concerning motor ability, motor performance, and physical fitness, but provides little knowledge
or information about why [people] become involved in sport or what the
satisfactions are for [them] (Harris, 1973, p. 5).

Metheny (1968) was one of the earlier researchers to conceptualize the
notion of personal meaning in relation to sport. Metheny (1968) concluded
from experiential descriptions of sport participants that individuals who may
indeed feel “recreated” or “physiologically stimulated” from sport participation
need not justify their interest solely in these terms. Instead, Metheny (1968)
mentioned that individuals may pursue a seemingly “trivial task in the symbolic
world of sport for what it is in its own right...[they] may value it because it
creates a meaningful image of [themselves]” (Metheny, 1968, p. 76).

Building on Metheny’s (1968) conceptual framework, Kenyon (1968,
1970) developed an inventory that assessed attitudes toward physical activity
(ATPA). With refinements and alterations, Kenyon’s final instrument examined
the relationship between attitudes and physical activity within six separate
domains. These were categorized as physical activity for the pursuit of: (a)
social experience, (b) vertigo, (c) catharsis, (d) health and fitness, (e) an ascetic
experience, and (f) an aesthetic experience.

Kenyon (1968, 1970) determined that there were significant relationships
between attitudes toward physical activity and sex, values, age, behavioral
disposition, and culture. He found that males rated the social experience as the most important factor in influencing their attitudes. This was followed by health and fitness, catharsis, aesthetics, pursuit of vertigo and ascetic experiences. Females ranked aesthetic experience as the most meaningful aspect of their participation, followed in importance by social experience, health and fitness, catharsis, pursuit of vertigo, and ascetics (Kenyon, 1968, 1970).

Although Kenyon (1968, 1970) attempted to define the precise nature of personal meaning, his studies did not adequately measure the influence of competition as a factor within this construct. In response, a series of inventories were developed that were designed to measure the influence of competition on personal meaning and attitudes toward sport (Apgar, 1977; Webb, 1969).

In a subsequent investigation, Kidd and Woodman (1975) developed a scale called “orientation toward winning” (OTW). This inventory attempted to assess reasons for participation in physical activity, and included components of competition and the pursuit of victory. Participants were asked to rank four separate items: (a) winning is the most important thing in a competitive contest, (b) to win in sports is essential, (c) victory is important because it is the ultimate reason for the contest, and (d) winning may not be everything, but it is more
important than anything else. Participants were also asked to rank three conceptions concerning their sport participation. These were: (a) play for fun, (b) play well, and (c) play to win. Results suggested that significant differences between men and women were discovered with regard to the importance placed on winning. Women were more likely to emphasize “playing for fun” and “playing well”, while men were more disposed toward “playing to win” (Kidd & Woodman, 1975). This gender difference regarding the importance of winning was supported in later research by Battista (1988) and Walker (1989).

In similar studies with college students, Snyder and Spreitzer (1979) found a strong linkage between athletic experience and the desire to win among student-athletes. In addition, both male and female student-athletes were more likely to rank winning higher than non-student-athletes. Snyder and Spreitzer (1989) later concluded that a person’s commitment to sport was linked to fun and pleasure, pride, social approval, health, fellowship, and a favorable self-concept.

To discern reasons for participation in a variety of sports, Nelson (1982) devised a personal motivation scale. This scale ranked concepts influencing individual meaning regarding sport participation, such as frustration, joy, sadness, and physical benefits. In addition, she examined personal
components of sport participation such as mastery, beauty of nature, social interaction, physicality, external rewards, and expression.

According to the literature, it would appear that personal meaning in sport implies that human beings move for unique reasons (Battista, 1988; Kenyon, 1970; Metheny, 1968; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989). These purposes include finding or extending a sense of self through sport and physical activity. Jewett (1980) suggested that the value of movement can be grouped into three clusters; fitness, performance, and transcendence. All three can have personal relevance and meaning. An educative setting subscribing to this ideology would most likely highlight personal purposes, human intentions, and individual motivations and incentives within the parameters of the teaching/learning environment (Jewett, 1980).

Based on Kenyon’s (1970) identification of perceived values of participation in physical activity and Allen’s (1982) description of intrinsic values of movement from a psychological perspective, Jewett and Bain (1985) developed a personal meaning curriculum model for physical education. This schema is congruent with the tenets of andragogy, asserting that for an experience to be educational it must have meaning and significance for the individual. In this curricular paradigm students are viewed as holistic,
purposeful beings. The discovery and creation of meaning is acknowledged as
the most important and central task of education. Instructional programs seek
to develop individuals through self-directed learning, and students are given
the opportunity to assume the task of identifying their own goals while
establishing their individual uniqueness. Fulfillment of personal potential is
sought through introduction to a range of meanings attainable through
participation in a variety of sports and physical activities. These experiences
are thought to both broaden horizons and deepen involvement in movement as
a component of personal integration. In this paragon, the principle
consideration is to develop interpersonal relations, social interaction, and group
processing skills (Jewett & Bain, 1985).

In addition to a focus on sport, competition, and curricular models, the
study of personal meaning has often been linked to assumptions regarding
leisure participation and the quality of life. John Kelly (1974), a primary figure in
the area of leisure research, has provided numerous analyses regarding the
importance and centrality of leisure to human development and relationships
throughout the life course. Kelly (1974) indicated that leisure was an integral
element of the human experience because of the inherent opportunities for
companionship. He felt that social influence was an extremely important
component of the sport and leisure encounter because most people value friendship, recognition, respect, and a feeling of belonging. These positive feelings, he believed, reinforce sport and leisure participation. In a study analyzing personal meaning with regard to leisure activities, Kelly found that "to enjoy companionship" and to "strengthen relationships" were the most frequently cited reasons for leisure participation (Kelly, 1974). Kelly pointed out that the phenomenon of leisure is critical to the exploration of interpersonal relationships and personal expression. By studying leisure more can be learned about the social context of the changing roles of humans throughout the life course, and the development of individual identities within these roles (Kelly, 1983).

In a study which examined sport, physical activity, and quality of life, Krotee and Bart (1986) argued that three personal components were essential to achieve fulfillment. These characteristics include happiness, development, and adaptation. For individuals to experience a high quality of life, they must primarily have experiences which are (a) enjoyable and pleasurable, (b) permit actualization and utilization of physical and psychosocial needs, and (c) permit acquisition of new physical and psychosocial resources allowing for adaptation to specific environmental situations. It is the researchers' contention that with
the advent of microcomputers and advanced testing methods, it is conceivable to create individualized prescriptions in physical education and sport. The objective would be to meet unique sets of student needs, and improve overall quality of life (Krotee & Bart, 1986).

William Glasser (1992) argues that our culture has become an “identity society” in which people seek out roles that provide them with a sense of individuality and a feeling of self-worth. Glasser (1992) maintains that to achieve identity requires involvement with some segment of social life. His perspective is that participation in athletic activities is a source of continued support for an athletic identity.

In a study which analyzed identity affirmation through leisure activities, researchers indicated that individuals affirm the nature of their identities through a variety of mechanisms. These include selection of and participation in leisure pursuits. Findings indicated that through leisure activities identity can be maintained and expressed. The motivation for participating in specific leisure activities is that these activities affirm valued aspects of our identities (Haggard & Williams, 1992).
Summary

The first section of this chapter focused on aging and intelligence. There has been a good deal of interest and research conducted on this construct but because of its intangible and elusive qualities, no absolute method of measuring it has been found. Factors which influence intelligence may be related to health, energy, socioeconomic status, level of education, and cohort membership. There are two types of intelligence, crystallized and fluid, which influence such issues as learning and retention. Crystallized intelligence is associated with vocabulary, reason, verbal skills, general information and number facility, and can increase throughout life. Fluid intelligence is related to short-term memory, abstract thought, and creativity. It is believed to be genetically affiliated, and declines slowly with age. Understanding aging and its effect on intelligence and learning has important implications for designing appropriate and meaningful educational opportunities for older adults.

The second section considered the construct of learning. Although there are many definitions for this term, most would agree that learning is an active process which involves change. It may include acquiring new habits, information, or attitudes, enabling learners to make personal or social
adjustments. The act of learning, itself, is a condition basic to human existence. Learning occurs throughout the lifespan.

The third section reviewed the literature with regard to the adult learner. Research was presented which discusses characteristics of the mature student. In addition, philosophies and theories describing the aims and purposes of adult education were examined.

Lastly, the fourth section analyzed the meaning of physical activity for an older adult population. Though scientific evidence indicated exercise is beneficial to every age group, a perceived social inappropriateness may keep some from actively engaging in physical activity. This is a concern, since research has shown an association between exercise, health, and life satisfaction. In order to overcome reservations among some older adults, the learning climate should perhaps be modified, emphasizing the social aspects of participating in physical activity.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"There is no burden of proof. There is only the world to experience and understand. Shed the burden of proof to lighten the load for the journey of experience."

Halcolm's Evaluation Laws

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the personal meaning learning and participating in physical activity had in the lives of five older adults. A secondary focus was to investigate Knowles' andragological tenets to determine what, if any, bearing they may have had in relation to learning and acquiring sport skills.

This chapter is designed to describe the methods utilized for gathering and analyzing data for this investigation. Specifically, this chapter focused on presenting the following: (a) rationale for the research design, (b) description of the case study methodology, (c) selection of the participants and setting, (d) means by which access was obtained, (e) data collection, (f) data analysis, and (g) relevant research issues.

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Rationale for the Research Design

A qualitative methodological design was chosen for this investigation because of its ability to accommodate the subtle complexities of participants' values, thoughts, and feelings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). According to Sankar and Gubrium (1994), one clear strength of qualitative research is its ability to detect, represent, and explicate meaning from the viewpoint of the participants themselves. They continue by explaining that by drawing on what is called cultural theory, the qualitative paradigm "assumes that everyday experiences of life vary significantly, and one cannot interpret the nature of those experiences by mechanically assigning subjects to groups such as African-American or Caucasian, male or female, young, old, or oldest old" (Sankar & Gubrium, 1994, p. viii). This perspective is in keeping with the philosophy of Erikson (1986), who notes that ethnographic methodologies are particularly well-suited to interpretive studies in which inferences are made about value judgments and personal meaning. Also, Jorgensen (1989) pointed out that a qualitative design is especially useful when little is known about the phenomenon. In addition, Locke (1989) explains that qualitative research approaches are effective in interpreting phenomena and situations, in defining fresh ways to look at everyday issues, and for describing social settings. In the present case, there
has been very little research linking adult learning theory with physical education. In support of this methodology in such cases, Patton (1990) states that qualitative research is helpful when the research focuses on the process of “how something happens rather than on the outcomes or results obtained” (Patton, 1990, p. 94). As the focus of this study was to collect interpretative data regarding the personal meaning learning and participating in physical activity had for older people rather than evaluating performance outcomes or level of skill, a design which allowed for this aspect to emerge was necessary.

**Case Study Methodology**

By utilizing a qualitative methodological paradigm there was opportunity for conducting what is called case study analysis (Patton, 1990). This technique refers to specific conclusions garnered from closely observed and identified patterns of particular people or events. According to Patton (1990), case studies are particularly useful for developing rich information concerning special individuals, specific problems, or unique situations in great depth. In addition, Stake maintained that good case studies may “provide more valid portrayals, better bases for personal understanding of what is going on, and solid grounds for considering action” (Stake, 1981, p. 32). Further, Stake (1995) explained that case studies facilitate understanding specific events or the
nature of individual complexities through their close examination (Stake, 1995). Techniques that attempt to capture individual or unique differences, perceptions, variations, and effects are important and desirable outcomes of qualitative inquiries. A qualitative case study approach seeks to describe phenomena with “depth and detail, in context, and holistically” (Patton, 1990, p. 54). Finally, Patton concluded that “how you study the world determines what you learn about the world” (Patton, 1990, p. 67). He postulated that methods which take the researcher into and close to participants’ lived experience increase the likelihood for results and findings that are grounded in the empirical world.

Selection of the Participants

Qualitative researchers often focus on relatively small samples, even single cases. The reason for this is because the goal of qualitative inquiry is to develop “participant perspectives,” an approach which focuses on understanding the experiences of the participants and the meaning they create in their lives. As the focus of this study was to develop rich, “thick” data about meanings in learning and participation in physical activity, it was preferable to utilize a purposeful sampling approach to explore the experiences and perceptions of a small number of older adults. According to Strauss and
Corbin (1990), purposeful sampling is appropriate when data regarding specific categories, properties, or dimensions are sought. In order to answer the research questions, deliberate choices were made relative to the settings and participants. This type of sampling procedure is well grounded in the qualitative paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The participants in the current study were seven members of a metropolitan senior center who voluntarily signed up for a tennis course. This course was offered through a collaboration between the senior center and a tennis club. All were over the age of 62 years old. Of the seven who initially joined the course, three women and two men agreed to follow through with the study. The other two seniors left the group of their own accord. The reasons given for their non-participation were lack of time and the belief that the lessons were offered too early in the morning. The five remaining participants were Caucasian and middle-class, and all were retired or semi-retired from full-time careers. Four of the participants lived in a large midwestern city and one resided in a rural area, commuting to the city each week for the tennis lessons.

Although I was already familiar with this senior center and some of its members through previous investigative work, my initial contact with these particular participants was at the tennis club just after their first class meeting.
At that time, I introduced myself, explained my background and the reason for my visit. After discussing the general purposes of my research, I asked the seniors if any of them might be interested in taking part in the study. They all responded affirmatively, so I talked with them about my intent to collect observational and interview data. Again, they willingly and unanimously agreed to take part in both interviews and observations, seeming enthused by the prospect.

Selection of Setting

The tennis course was a 15-week experience beginning in April and ending in July 1995. The class met for an hour once a week. A collaborative effort on the part of the senior center and a local tennis and swim club, there was no charge for the instruction or use of the facility.

The setting for this study took place initially within an indoor tennis facility during the chilly first half of the course. This tennis club consisted of a pro shop, locker rooms, and three inflated “bubbles.” These “bubbles” contained four tennis courts each. Well-kept with good lighting and the court temperature regulated, this facility was a comfortable place to play. Later, when the weather was warm, we moved outdoors to the tennis courts of a large, metropolitan park. To avoid the summer heat, the course was scheduled early
in the morning. Usually, our group were the only tennis players present at that hour. Though it was a public facility, it almost always seemed as though we had all of the tennis courts to ourselves.

The free tennis course was offered to the seniors for two reasons. On the part of the senior center, the rationale was to increase programming while providing interested members with an additional opportunity to exercise and socialize together. The course was just one of many opportunities available for members at the cost of only two dollars a year. An active, growing senior center funded primarily by city parks and recreation, there was a variety of travel, educational, social, and physical activity offerings to choose from. This was due in part to the philosophy of the director, who believed that formulating multiple programs was an important part of her job. Her view was that variegated activities are more likely to meet the needs of a wide spectrum of individuals, and serve to increase the overall dynamism and growth of the center.

The activity of tennis was selected because it met the requirements sought regarding older adults learning physical activities. These components included finding a situation where older adults would receive instruction on mechanics, rules, and strategies by an expert knowledgeable not only in the
sport, but in teaching methods, as well. This criteria eliminated a study of aerobics, a program at the senior center, because this activity had no teacher. Instead, the participants listened to an aerobic tape at each session, trying to follow the directions therein.

Another important consideration was related to activity level. For this study, I wanted to investigate the meanings associated with learning and participation in a vigorous, sport-related, physical activity. Program offerings in walking and ballroom dance at the senior center did not meet this criteria. Other activities offered at the senior center were eliminated from consideration because they were already underway. I decided more could be learned by beginning at the ground level with a group of senior participants.

The tennis club, however, had a very different orientation toward the seniors and the tennis course. The club is a business in a very competitive industry. Their considerations, therefore, were made from a financial perspective.

Increasing membership is an integral part of the tennis club’s strategy. It appeared that throughout the week many of the courts stood empty during the morning hours. Management’s view was that seniors might be able to fill up these less popular time slots. The personnel at this tennis club recognized
that older adults present a lucrative segment of the market, since many have both the time and resources to engage in leisure activities. They hoped to "hook" more seniors on the game of tennis, expecting that a free instructional course would begin to generate increased interest and additional revenue from this portion of the population.

Access

Bogdan and Biklen (1983) recommend using the "overt approach" in most cases with regard to data collection, meaning researchers should make their interests known to those involved and seek their cooperation. Berg (1989) calls this entry into the research location "getting in", and defines its method as "various techniques and procedures intended to secure access to a setting, its participants, and knowledge about phenomena and activities being observed" (Berg, 1989, p. 14). In order to negotiate entry for this research investigation and gain access to these participants, I realized I would need permission from the primary gatekeepers; that is, the director of the senior center and the manager of the tennis club.

I asked the director of the senior center to allow me to observe and participate with members engaged in learning a physical activity. I also gave her a letter (Appendix A) from my dissertation advisor and myself defining my
research objectives and requesting permission for this study. Having been involved in an earlier, preliminary research project at this center gave me what is called "insider status" (Patton, 1990). The director, knowing of my interest and previous work with "her" older adults, was enthusiastic and helpful. Being known and trusted by the director smoothed the way for the present investigation.

Next, I spoke to the manager at the tennis club about my research plan. Skeptical at first, once he understood I had the backing and full cooperation of the senior center he was very welcoming. It was also helpful that I was acquainted with the assistant manager, an instructor, and some of the members at this club. Still, while previous acquaintance opened the door, I was initially an outsider to the senior members I encountered. To conduct this study, I needed to develop a rapport with and obtain the cooperation and acceptance of the participants themselves.

Data Collection

To capture the details of how older adults learn physical activity and the personal meaning they derive from this process, information was collected through three contexts. The primary sources of data for this study were (a) a background questionnaire used to obtain demographic information, (b) informal
and semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants, and (c) observations and field note recordings.

A. Questionnaire

A questionnaire (Appendix B) was given to each participant in order to elicit basic demographic information such as age, gender, educational level, employment, and other important descriptors. In addition, each participant was asked to (a) characterize their previous sport participation, (b) write a brief paragraph about themselves, (c) indicate why they enrolled in the course, (d) discuss what styles of teaching they preferred, and (e) relate what they hoped to learn.

B. Informal and Semi-structured Interviews

Two semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants engaged in this study. Each interview was an hour to two hours in length. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), the interview is a purposeful conversation employed to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words. From this information the researcher may develop insights on how subjects interpret their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The purpose of utilizing this method in this research study was to assess students’ construction of personal
meaning regarding the process of participating and learning about physical activity. These interviews revealed patterns and understandings about how and why older adults learn and participate in physical activity, and what makes that learning meaningful. The number of interviews was determined by what is called "theoretical sampling technique". With this method of data collection, interviews are concluded when consistent patterns in the responses are noticed and no new data themes are being generated. At this point, data saturation is said to have been reached (Denzin, 1978). Consequently, more important than the number is the quality of these encounters. As recurring themes began to emerge during the second interview, I felt this point had been attained.

The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide. I conducted interviews through this approach because while freedom and flow was still possible, methodical exploration of specific questions could also be addressed. The interview guide (Appendix C) was used to keep myself focused on the research questions, yet conversationally draw out the experiences, thoughts, and expectations of my participants. Each semi-structured interview was audio-taped, and transcriptions were made. Also, I entered notes and comments into my field journal after I conducted the interviews. As for the
informal interviews; that is, the casual conversations that took place between myself as researcher and the participants during the study, these notes were recorded after the conclusion of each class.

C. Observations and Field Notes

According to Berg (1989), "the central component of ethnographic research is the ethnographic account. Providing such narrative accounts for what goes on in the lives of study subjects derives from having maintained complete, accurate, and detailed field notes" (Berg, 1989, p. 71). As the researcher in an interpretive study, I kept in-depth field notes of every class I observed. Field notes are defined by Bogdan and Bilken (1992) as "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 107). The field note data involved an account of my noticing the tasks and events of the classes, as well as my perceptions regarding student participation, feelings, and impressions. There was no claim of objectivity since this process made up the reflexive, personal component of the study. These detailed observations provided information regarding my thoughts concerning the level of understanding and learning among the participants, and their development of meaning regarding the learning process.
According to Erickson (1986), the technique of observation is used to document universal principles and to cite the particulars of individuals' interaction and development of meaning (Erickson, 1986). Also, Erickson (1982) states that if learning is be viewed theoretically as interaction between individual and environment, adequate description of cognitive learning includes actions of individual learners, relevant features of the environment, and show specific changes over the course of time. These interpretive details "support higher level inferences about changes in the learner's (unobservable) ways of thinking" (Erickson, 1982, p. 162). It was my intent to record extensive observations about the setting, activities, and behaviors in order to develop what is called "thick" description (Patton, 1990). With regard to this method, Patton concludes that "the discipline and rigor of qualitative analysis depend on presenting solid descriptive data, what is often called thick description, in such a way that others reading the results can understand and draw their own interpretations" (Patton, 1990, p. 375).

In addition to the data collection procedures already described, a personal journal was kept throughout this investigation. The information recorded in this document related to such factors as (a) my own reflections on the research process, (b) methodological and logistical issues, (c) questions
and concerns, (d) personal insights regarding my own biases and values, and (e) my own changing perceptions of the participants and of the value of the learning process.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of systematically examining transcripts, field notes, and other materials to increase understanding of the information collected. The analytic task involves interpreting data, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, and discovering what is important enough to report (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This process occurred both simultaneously and after the data collection took place (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erikson, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The first interview guide in this study was formulated based on a preliminary study conducted at the senior center (Rosenberg, Nelson, & Workman, 1994). Each participant’s interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim on to a word processing program. Furthermore, the questionnaires and my journal and field notes were added to the computer data, and were used in the analysis.

The transcribed interviews were read several times in order to thoroughly understand the substantive issues within. Noticings were made of
the similar patterns and themes that emerged, and these were coded. The
transcribed responses and comments were grouped into categories relating to
adult participation in sport and the development of meaning. Examples of
themes included issues concerning teaching, learning, or the importance of
physical activity. Categories were created, coded, merged, and adjusted as the
analysis proceeded. The themes that finally emanated from the data included
past sport participation, health, aging, learning, relationships, and personal
meaning.

Questionnaires were used to develop demographic information and
biographical profiles of each participant. The written information was coded for
statements revealing seniors’ perceptions of learning and physical activity.
The notes of my observations and reflections throughout the study were
periodically sorted, coded, and analyzed for patterns and themes. These data
categories helped with the construction of a second interview guide (Appendix
D). Throughout, specific questions designed to elicit thoughts on the meaning
of learning and engaging in physical activity were asked of the research
participants.

To organize the data, the transcribed interviews were printed and
separately coded with colored pencils according to emergent themes. Then, to
facilitate the analysis, the coded data from all the interviews were sorted, loaded, and merged through a computer process. This enabled me to view each interview separately and holistically and also as a group and by category, based on themes.

Reporting the data is discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who point out that naturalistic inquiry is inclined to interpret data ideographically rather than nomenthetically. The reason for this, they assert, is because different interpretations are likely to be meaningful for different realities, and because interpretations depend so much on other variables such as the investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, the qualitative inquiry method is “more adapted to a description of the multiple realities encountered” of the participants of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41). It is for these reasons that a qualitative paradigm was chosen.

Research Issues

When conducting qualitative research, it is imperative that the researcher address such issues as credibility, neutrality, and consistency of the findings (Guba, 1981). In order to provide what is called “trustworthiness” in the study, the researcher must allow the multiple realities of the participants to
come forth. Descriptive data about the context must be provided, as well as about how dependability in data collection and analysis was maintained. Finally, the researcher must show that the findings are grounded in the data. In order to strengthen the design of this study, three qualitative techniques were utilized: triangulation, member checking, and field notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is the process of converging on a conclusion from different points. It allows for the researcher to explore contrasting perceptions, obtain information from other sources, and reveal distinct aspects of what is being studied (Patton, 1990). According to Denzin (1978), triangulation may be done by using different researchers, different viewpoints to interpret the same problem, a variety of data sources, or a variety of methods. In this study, I conducted a triangulation of method since information from field notes, interviews, and background questionnaires were used against each other to cross-check data and interpretations.
**Member Checks**

Member checks (Guba, 1981), called face validity by Lather (1986), consisted of going back to the respondents with information collected and interpretations made in order to clarify or modify the data. According to some researchers, the procedure of member checking is “the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

During the course of this study, I gave my participants copies of their transcripts and asked them to confirm their accuracy. I also asked them to add, delete, or change any additional thoughts or comments. I made adjustments to my data depending on their responses to their transcriptions and my interpretations. Utilizing this strategy not only gave the participants power over their own words, but lent strength and credibility to the overall research design.

**Generalizability**

The term “generalizability” refers to whether the findings of a study are applicable to other populations and settings. In a positivist research investigation, quantitative investigators will usually intend for their results to
furnish information about a larger group of subjects than the one studied. To make generalizations from an observed to an unobserved population within this paradigm, the researcher must draw random samples and control for as many variables as possible. The extent to which a scientific experiment can control for influences which may affect the replicability of the results is said to increase the study's external validity (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1985).

In qualitative studies such as this, researchers do not intend to imply in their results that all populations and situations are like the one studied. In this investigation, the sample chosen was small and purposive because the intent was to learn about the contextual background of older adults and the meanings behind their learning and participating in physical activity. In order to more deeply understand the nature and action of participants in this study, I took an inductive, interpretative approach toward data collection and analysis. The concern was not with whether the findings were generalizable, but with what other settings and subjects might they be transferable.

According to Patton (1990), in post-positivist research transferability replaces generalizability. Transferability is associated with how the individuals studied are in some ways representative of those to whom the results may be
generalized. Through the development of thick description and the presentation of this research data in the narrative form, it is possible to consider alternative populations or situations for which the findings might be applicable. This is in keeping with the objectives of qualitative research, which are more often inclined to seek meaning, depth and understanding within a study than provide broad generalizations for the scientific community (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

**Ethics**

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), there are two primary guidelines with regard to ethics and human subjects. These are informed consent and protection of the participants from harm. These guidelines insure that:

1. Subjects enter research projects voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved.

2. Subjects are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might derive (Bodgan & Biklen, 1983, p. 49).

Before the data collection began, approval for the research proposal was obtained from the Human Subjects Review Committee at The Ohio State University. At this point, each participant was given a letter (Appendix E)
stating the purpose of the research investigation. They were encouraged to read the letter and ask questions concerning the study. Once this had been done, they were asked to sign a written consent form stating that they understood the study and had voluntarily agreed to take part in it. The consent form was explicit about the intent to conduct observations and audiotaped interviews. The participants were informed that they could at any time withdraw from the study, stop the interviews, delete or change any part of their transcripts. They were also made aware that though excerpts of our conversations would emerge as data in the final document, their anonymity would be protected and preserved through the use of pseudonyms. In addition, the director of the senior center and the manager of the tennis club were given letters which stated the objectives of the study. They both verbally agreed to the study, and signed written consent forms authorizing this work. The director of the senior center then wrote her own letter affirming her knowledge and support of this research investigation.

General principles concerning ethical behavior on the part of the researcher were followed in this investigation. These principles include: (a) protecting the participants’ identities, (b) treating the participants with respect,
(c) seeking cooperation of all participants and gatekeepers, (c) realistically negotiating terms of the agreement, and (d) telling the truth in reporting the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Throughout this study, it was understood that research ethics center on the value and rights of the individual. This code of conduct meant that every participant had a right to privacy, confidentiality, and freedom from exploitation. Decisions and choices were made regarding this ethic and my role as a participant observer. It was not always an easy task. As Jorgensen (1989) concluded, “like values and politics, research ethics are matters of constant concern as the participant observer identifies a problem for study, gains access to everyday life situations, participates, interacts, and develops relationships with other human beings.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative studies, researchers tend to view reliability as the fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting. Literal consistency across different observations is usually not a central objective. In fact, in a single setting it would be acceptable for more than one
researcher to produce different findings. Reliability would be questioned, however, if the findings were contradictory in nature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Further, Patton (1990) states that the definition of validity and reliability in qualitative research is far removed from the quantitative understandings of these constructs. He wrote that “the validity and reliability of data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) goes on to explain that validity in quantitative research depends on careful instrument construction and application. However, in qualitative inquiry it is the researcher who serves as the instrument. Validity depends largely on the investigator’s level of integrity and skill.

According to Seidman (1991), many qualitative researchers disagree with the epistemological assumptions underlying the conceptions of validity and reliability. Because of innate, philosophical differences in technique between qualitative and quantitative models of inquiry, words such as “trustworthiness,” “transferability,” “dependability,” “credibility,” and “confirmability” are considered the more acceptable terminology within this paradigm. Seidman (1991) claims that the idea of objectivity as it relates to
reliability and validity is often criticized. In fact, it has been argued that "the most profound knowledge can be gained only by the deepest intersubjectivity among researchers and that which they are researching" (Ferrarotti, 1981, in Seidman, 1991, p. 17).

Jorgensen (1989) wrote that while participant observation shares the goal of obtaining accurate and truthful findings, there is no necessary conflict between personal, subjective interests or values and the scientific goal of truth. "Rather than denying personal interests and values, the methodology of participant observation requires an awareness of how these thoughts and feelings influence research" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 27).

In this investigation, reliability and validity issues were addressed through the concept of "credibility." According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is the extent to which the realities constructed by the participants match those presented by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility of this study was enhanced and the research design strengthened through the utilization of triangulation, member checks, and my own reflexive journal.
Trustworthiness

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), “time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data” (p. 146). The more time spent at the research site building rapport with participants, the more likely it is that the respondents will be candid in their interviews. In this study, a great deal of personal time was spent with the participants within and outside of the research setting. The tennis lessons were each an hour in length, lasting for a total of fifteen weeks. However, additional time was spent outside of the tennis setting casually conversing or taking part in some activity with the members of this group. In addition, it has been theorized that triangulation strengthens the trustworthiness factor in a qualitative research design (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this case, triangulation of method was utilized, including observation, interview and questionnaire. Further, being alert to one’s own biases and subjectivity assists in producing a more trustworthy interpretation (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this investigation, the journal I kept throughout the study was an outlet for evaluating and questioning my own opinions and understandings concerning learning, physical activity, and aging. Finally, by sharing the interpretive process with respondents, one increases the
trustworthiness of the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This was done through the member checking component incorporated in this investigation.

Summary

This chapter explained the research methodology that was utilized in this study. A rationale was given for the decision to apply a qualitative paradigm, and for using the case study approach. A description of the participants, settings, techniques for data collection and analysis, and relevant research issues was also included. The following chapter is a presentation of the research data.
CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION

"The most useful of all human capacities is the capacity to learn from others."

Author Unknown

Overview

This study explored the meaning learning and participating in physical activity had in the lives of five older adults. The findings of this investigation are presented in this chapter. The chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) overview of research analyses, (b) biographies of the participants, (c) background of the tennis study, (d) research setting, (e) tennis course, (f) instruction, (g) themes, (h) past sport participation, (i) health, (j) relationships, (k) learning, (l) aging, and (m) personal meaning.

The data gathered for this study were derived from observations, a personal journal, questionnaires, and interviews conducted with five people participating in a tennis course sponsored by a local senior center. The interviews were transcribed and examined individually for emergent themes,
then coded, categorized and compared. Six themes frequently appeared and are discussed at length within this chapter. These topics include past sport participation, physiological health, relationships, learning, aging, and personal meaning. In addition, the words or “voices” of the participants themselves were presented in order to establish a certain level of authenticity and reflexivity within this study. Through contextually situating the participants’ remarks against the historic, social, and economic frameworks of their lives, the intent was to create a fair portrayal and description of the meanings learning and participating in sport had for this segment of an older adult population.

A copy of each transcribed interview was given to the participants for review. Through the use of member checking the learners had the opportunity to edit their own words. They were encouraged to delete, add, explain, or change any part they chose. Giving the participants this opportunity seemed to meet with their approval and added to the trustworthiness of the study. Only one person refused to read the transcript, remarking over and over again that “I’m sure it’s fine”. This refusal could have implied a gracious show of unquestioned support or a complete absence of interest; either explanation is plausible. Although there were no significant contextual changes offered to the transcriptions, three of the participants were uncomfortable with how their
grammar and words "sounded". For example, one transcripted copy was returned with a note which read,

The next new thing I should do is to become a better speaker. Think before I speak, not ramble, and be better organized with my words. I apologize for this interview for the many mistakes I made while talking. The mistakes were "speech-wise"; what I told was true.

**Biographies of the Participants**

In order to familiarize the reader with the participants in this study, descriptive background information concerning the histories, families, and work experiences of these individuals was provided. The participants in this study included three females and two males between the ages of 63 and 84 years old.

**Rose**

Rose, a 63-year-old woman, resided on a farm 50 miles north of a large midwestern city. She was from a family of six children and grew up on the same farm where she now lives. Rose has two adult children. Her first husband died ten years ago from a heart attack. At that point, Rose left her job as a kindergarten teacher and went back to school for a Master’s degree in counseling. She obtained her degree and went to work in the school system in which she had taught for the last 25 years. This time, however, her position was that of an elementary school guidance counselor and reading teacher. She
later married a man who was a principal in the same school district. After a few years, she retired from employment within the school system, but became very involved in a private agency dealing with children’s drug and alcohol prevention programs. Currently, she serves as an in-school counselor for troubled teens and children. She continues to remain active in the drug and alcohol prevention program, and often attends educational seminars and workshops meant to provide training, information, support, and strategies for improving service and help for kids with drug and alcohol problems.

Relative to her sport experience, Rose recalled that although the family sometimes recreated, sport-related physical activity was not an important aspect of farm life. There was little time or opportunity for leisure pursuits. For instance, neither she, her parents, nor her five siblings learned to swim while at home on the farm. This was due to the fact that the nearest lake was several miles away, and the family did not often make the journey. When I asked her to reflect on her parents and siblings involvement in physical activity, Rose replied:

I can remember my dad playing some horseshoes and croquet, and playing pick-up baseball with his brothers at family outings. I can’t remember my mother doing those kinds of things. They were hard-working farm people, and when Sunday came around they had a big Sunday dinner and instead of getting outside and doing a lot of what we call “fun things” they took naps and took it easy. They refueled for the
coming week. We kids played games, running games like all kids do, I guess. Kick the can, things like that. We didn't have horses as such to ride when I was growing up but I do remember riding the work horses in from the field sometimes. It was fun being a little person up on top of this great big horse.

Rose had not played much tennis before, yet she really seemed to enjoy the class. From my observations, I perceived that she was a person who loved to move, loved to play, and loved to laugh. Although Rose sometimes moaned about her performance, she continued to gamely chase down every ball she could, happily making her best effort for each shot.

Fred

Fred, a 74-year-old man, was born and raised during the Depression in Buffalo, New York. He has just one other sibling. Fred was single, having gotten a divorce 15 years ago from his wife after 28 years of marriage. He has two grown children, a daughter and a son.

During his early childhood, Fred contracted polio. Although he eventually recovered, the disease left him weakened, especially in his legs, requiring him to undergo extensive physical therapy. His hospitalization and recovery put him two years behind his classmates in school. To condition his body and strengthen his legs after his illness, Fred took up running. In high school he participated on the cross-country team, but quit a year later because
he found the sport "too solitary". He loved athletics as a child and played baseball, football, and basketball on his high school's teams.

After high school Fred joined the service and went to Okinawa for two years. While overseas he played football, basketball, volleyball, and tennis. As he described it, sports helped him develop friendships among the other soldiers and curtail the stifling boredom he often felt with island life. Accomplished teams got to compete against other units, and Fred explained his participation by saying that "I wanted to play sports because I liked them, plus I wanted to get out of work!" After he came home, he attended college and became very active in intramural sports. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in history, he went to work in a small town in eastern Ohio. He continued his athletic endeavors through his participation on church and community softball teams. When his children got involved in sports, Fred became a youth coach. After his divorce many years later, he moved to a large metropolis where he played softball in the city recreation senior leagues. However, he felt he did not get enough playing time, and he became discouraged and quit.

Fred said that he is retired from advertising sales. However, he has engaged in many occupations in his lifetime. During his stint in the Air Force,
he was assigned to a demolition unit where he dismantled bombs and rockets. After the war, he got involved in small arms instruction. He also had a job in a factory making airplane parts. Later, he obtained a position at a television station, eventually moving up to director in the sales department. After 15 years with the company, he bought a restaurant and went into business for himself. It was successful, but when he and his wife split, he sold the business and left town.

In a new city, Fred first managed a fast food restaurant, then started back into sales work. He became interested in horse racing and casino gambling, and taught himself the skills necessary to become relatively successful. At one point he considered working the gaming tables as an employee in Las Vegas, Atlantic City, or the Bahamas. He gave it up when he decided that “the dealers didn’t look happy.” Although now retired, Fred will on occasion earn extra money by working in a telecommunications recovery business. He became interested in commodities, and is currently in the process of teaching himself the art of buying and selling investments.

Fred was a man who had been an athlete for the majority of his life, and his experience in sport came through in the way he approached this activity. Fred was by far the most competitive of the group, and our best player. I
wondered at first why he stayed with us, because he was obviously more skilled than the rest. Tall and lean, at the age of 74 Fred still exuded the physical confidence of a conditioned athlete.

Betty

Betty, 66, grew up with four brothers and a sister. She is married with one adult daughter. Employed as an engineering technician, Betty went through the transition to computer drawings toward the end of her career. She has only been retired one year. Betty talked as though she liked her job because she found it stimulating. She was required to learn about computers and though she considered that frustrating at times, she also enjoyed the challenge and mastery of something new. Betty admits that she sometimes misses her job. She confessed that there is now a void in her life. For this reason she recently agreed to do some part-time work for the phone company.

As a child, Betty and her siblings were active in a variety of rough and tumble street games, even though her parents did not have much time for recreation. When I asked her whether her mother and father were ever athletically involved, Betty said:
No, not like you see it today. Now my dad, he would get out and enjoy bowling, things like that, but my mother, no, she was always in the kitchen working or in the basement doing laundry for us all. She always worked.

Betty had been recently galvanized to become more physically active by her family. Her daughter is an avid sports enthusiast. By strongly encouraging and supporting her mother’s participation in physical activity, this daughter has played the most important role in persuading Betty to join the tennis group.

My observations of Betty in the tennis class indicated that she comes across as a rather fit, vigorous, and athletic woman. Friendly and warm, Betty always seems fairly energetic and positive. She appears younger than her age. Concerned with health issues, Betty is interested in maintaining an active lifestyle and has become quite enthused over learning tennis. After several weeks with an antiquated piece of borrowed equipment, she decided to make a serious commitment to the game. Following some debate regarding styles and prices, she went out and bought her very own first racket. She attributed part of her success in tennis to her new purchase, and seemed very pleased with her decision.

The only aspect of our tennis experience that Betty says she does not enjoy is getting herself up and ready for an early morning lesson. She laughingly described herself as an “owl” rather than a “lark,” and admitted she
often lacks energy and organization in the morning hours. Since she is not naturally an early riser, I asked Betty what motivated her to get out of bed for this activity. She thought seriously for a moment, then insightfully replied:

You only get one chance. It’s once a week, and if you’re not there, you’ve missed it. They’ll go on without you. And you can never get it back. You’ve just missed it.

Betty had decided she is not willing to “miss it.” She viewed tennis as important to her life and made it a priority. Other people, including family, friends, and part-time employers, suddenly found themselves scheduled around her lessons and practices. Taking regular time out to do something just for herself was something new for Betty, and she seemed energized by the concept.

From my observations it appeared to me that Betty was just a natural athlete. She had never played an organized sport before, or taken lessons in any physical activity. At first, she missed the ball quite a lot. However, she was learning tennis for the first time. As the course progressed, I thought she caught on to the skills and strategies rather quickly. Betty seemed to have an instinctive court sense.

Betty told me she joined the senior center after her retirement because she felt an emptiness in her life. She missed taking part in meaningful activity
and wished for more interactions with other people. Still new to the membership, Betty found that the classes and activities provided at the center have helped her meet new people and fill her free time in positive and enjoyable ways.

**Charlie**

Charlie, 84, was raised with his two brothers in a small town in Ohio. Like the other participants, he was brought up during the Great Depression. He recollected how his family had to struggle to survive.

Even as a young boy, Charlie was very determined to get ahead. Although his family was unable to offer him much in the way of financial support, he managed to work enough to put himself through school and become an engineer. When the war broke out, he enlisted and was shipped overseas. For four years he toured Africa and Italy, his company occasionally taking hits from artillery shells and bombs. Fortunately he returned unscathed, was married, and had two children. Much later his wife became an invalid, and he spent a great deal of time taking care of her needs.

Widowed now for several years, Charlie has refused to slow down. After he retired he did some consulting work, which he found quite interesting.
Later, he participated in civic matters which intrigued him, such as problems with the city's power plant and trash disposal systems.

Charlie mentioned that he is hard to reach. He explained he was a very busy man and often stayed out late at night. To avoid loneliness, Charlie has become active in many groups and organizations. These include bowling teams, senior center committees, and church work. He also volunteers as a tutor at one of the public elementary schools. In addition, Charlie finds time for an active social life, and is dating a number of eligible widows. Interested in politics, government, current events and the latest developments in technology and science, Charlie is a man who is vitally interested in keeping up with the most contemporary information.

When I asked Charlie whether his parents ever enjoyed sports or relaxing physical activities, he said:

No, when we were kids, about all we did was work. We lived through the Depression and I had to struggle to get through school and so did my two brothers. And we just spent a lot of time working.

However, Charlie mentioned that he and his brothers taught themselves to play tennis on a makeshift court. They became fairly accomplished at the sport, and continued to play competitively throughout a significant portion of their lives.
Though near-sightedness now hampered his game, once Charlie located the ball he usually hit it with both force and accuracy. His shots often carried spin, stayed low to the ground, and were difficult to return. While his skills were still good, his knowledge of the court and game strategy more than made up for any physical limitations he might have had. A left-hander, Charlie was one of the more accomplished tennis players in the group.

Thelma

Born and raised during the Depression in a small town in Kentucky, Thelma, 68, and her five siblings were the children of a peddler and a housewife. Though the family did not have the extra income to spend on recreational activities, Thelma managed to find ways in which to participate in a variety of sports. During her public school years she learned to swim and play basketball. She earned a scholarship to go to college, where she took up tennis, archery, volleyball, softball, table tennis, and dancing.

A good student who was always athletically inclined, Thelma wanted to major in Physical Education. However, since her college did not offer that program she instead graduated with degrees in Music and French. She taught for six years in the public schools, but when the family moved to Ohio she gave up her position and went with them. Her father bought a restaurant and Thelma
helped out with the business. After her father died, the family sold the
restaurant and Thelma got a job as a secretary with a construction company.
Later, she was hired as an accountant by a civil engineering firm, eventually
becoming the general manager. She’s been retired from her job for three years.
Thelma has two grown sons, whom she raised alone after she and her husband
divorced many years ago.

Thelma was a petite, smiling, and bright-eyed woman. Though her
tennis stroke was a little weak at times, she usually moved well to the ball. She
acted as though she truly enjoyed the tennis class, although she complained of
being a little rusty, having not played for over 50 years. Thelma was also
involved with aerobics, tap dancing, and assorted other physical activities.

Thelma revealed to me that throughout her life she has nourished two
loves; learning and sports. When I remarked how wonderful it was that she
had always been so active and interested in learning new activities, Thelma told
me:

Learning new things makes me feel good. It gives me satisfaction
knowing I can accomplish a skill reasonably well. I like to learn [a sport
skill] well enough to enjoy the sport and be able to comfortably play at
an upper level, not necessarily the highest level. When I finish any
sport activity, my body, though tired, feels rejuvenated. It makes me feel
glad that I can do the things that I do. Doing all these activities is giving
me back my strength, which I need.
After college, Thelma was introduced to golf, bowling, and ice skating, all of which she loved. Her newest activities, learned within the last three years, include weight-lifting, miniature car racing, and aerobics.

**Background of the Tennis Study**

The reason I became involved with the senior tennis players is because I wanted to study mature populations and the acquisition of sport skills. Interested in the psychological and sociological dimensions of athletic participation, I wanted to understand why people engage in learning sport skills at later stages in life. Additionally, I was interested in what constitutes good teaching for a mature population, and what motivates the older person to learn.

While searching for a group to study, I discovered that one of the more active and innovative senior centers had collaborated with a tennis club and put together a six-week series of tennis lessons for interested members. This opportunity would come free of charge for the seniors, and would include a weekly hour of court time at an indoor facility and lessons from a professional instructor.

The tennis club's management was motivated to promote this activity because they often have difficulty filling up their courts during the early week
day mornings. They are interested in generating some enthusiasm in the game of tennis among a segment of the population, which, as they know, has both the time and finances to take part in leisure pursuits. A small group of older adults at this club play a tennis-like game called “bird ball.” Developed at this site, “bird ball” modifies the game of tennis to allow for two bounces instead of one, and three players per side instead of two in order to reinvent the sport for people who are a little less mobile. The owners have decided that “bird ball” could catch on among seniors, and plan to promote the activity in the hope of starting a senior league in the near future. For these reasons the tennis club was amiable to donating early morning court time to this particular center.

Enthused by the possibilities, I approached the senior center and tennis club with my ideas for a research study, and received the green light from both. Now officially involved, my plan was to increase the length of the course from six weeks to twelve. In the end, I was able to continue the course and data collection period for a total of 15 weeks.

The Research Setting

The senior center in this study was located in what seemed to be a middle class neighborhood within a large midwestern city. For a mere two dollars a year, anyone over the age of 55 may join. A informational bulletin
listing all the programs, trips, and center news is mailed once a month to each of the members. Most programs offered at the center are free of charge. Those which are more expensive, like some of the trips, are offered at a nominal fee.

This center is directed by an energetic person who was excited by the notion of bringing tennis instruction to the members. The concept was originally proposed by a staff member, who agreed to set up the program and also teach it. Another staff member was assigned to help her. However, just before the course got underway, this staff member quit. The person left holding the bag was the assistant, who has very little knowledge or curiosity in the game of tennis. It was his thought to allow the seniors who had signed up for this course to just bat the ball around for a few weeks, then cancel the program for lack of interest. This was the point at which I stepped in.

The tennis club is a nice but in no way posh facility located in a middle class neighborhood. Along with tennis courts, there is a swimming pool, locker rooms, pro shop, and refreshment area. During the winter months, the club is converted to an indoor facility through the use of “bubbles,” or inflated plastic material that encircles the area. There are three such “bubbles” enclosing five courts apiece. The temperature within these spaces is always comfortably regulated.
The clientele appears to be primarily white young professionals. During the morning hours I noticed that women's leagues predominate. These women appear to be in their thirties and forties, and present a marked contrast to our group of seniors. Immaculately groomed, the members of the ladies' leagues appear to own the latest in warm-up suits and tennis equipment. Our group presented quite a contrast.

The last part of our class took place outdoors on the tennis courts of a nearby park. Because the park was owned by the city, there was no charge for its use. This site was close to the homes of all the members. We met early to avoid the crowds and the mid-day heat. The weather always seemed to cooperate, and we were never once rained out.

**The Tennis Course**

On my first visit to the tennis club, I met the manager and described, in detail, my proposed study. I explained that the center's staff person would no longer be involved, and that we needed a professional instructor. He asked me if I could do it. I thought about this for awhile, but decided that my interest was in studying learners, not teachers, and that interest would be better served through my role as a participant observer. When I related my thoughts on the
matter to the manager, he agreed to assign an instructor from the club as long as the center promised to pick up the cost.

Thinking that the plan was set, I was disappointed to learn that the following week on their first visit to the club, the seniors had court time, but no instructor. Instead of heading for home, the seniors gamely took to the courts, batting the ball about as best they could. I paid a visit to the manager to try to solve this problem.

It was not until the next week that the confusion was resolved, and the seniors were assigned an instructor named Mark. About 28 years old and physically fit, Mark seemed very personable, calm, and friendly to the group.

Mark did a good job with the seniors, putting them at ease with his relaxed and sincere manner. He had the class work on some basic fundamentals, including the forehand, backhand, and serve. Mark demonstrated how to grip the racket and what stance to use on the court. He had a rapt group of students to work with. Of the five learners present, two of them were fairly skilled men. Two of the women had played a little bit of tennis in their youth, and another woman was learning for the first time.

When the group arrived the following week for their third lesson, Mark said he could not take them because he had a rescheduled lesson to teach. I
was a little angry about this because these people were promised instruction and had arrived here ready to go at 8:00 in the morning. Again, I felt I had to have a talk with the manager.

In the meantime, the seniors cheerfully limbered up, picked partners, and began to volley on their own. They were a unique group. My overall initial impression was that this is a very resilient, energetic set of older adults. Although their skills ranged from slightly above average to poor, they seemed to enjoy themselves immensely. Even though they met with some annoying obstacles early on, they continued to come and play with remarkable determination. They appeared to want to help each other improve. It is interesting to note that I usually observed them doing their best to hit the ball back and forth to, rather than away, from each other. Nobody kept track of points and games won or lost. They never switched sides or altered partners. Instead, they selected a person who was, for the most part, close to their own playing ability. I was impressed at their level of concentration and effort. It was evident to me that they were serious about learning the game.

**Instruction**

According to the manager, Mark would no longer be available to us. He promised, however, to come up with somebody new next week. I felt like this
group was getting the shuffle. I wondered if it was because of our status as senior citizens. Were we experiencing a form of ageism here?

By the next week I was very curious as to who the new instructor would be, or if there would even be an instructor. True to his word, the manager produced a pro. As it turned out, the instructor was Stuart, coincidentally someone I had known for many years.

Stuart and his brother Mike used to teach lessons to kids down in the park. In high school Stuart was a tennis star. He was also one of the only African-Americans in town. Since at that time not many blacks played the “country club” sports of tennis and golf, it was marvelous that Stuart won an athletic scholarship at a Big Ten institution. He competed four years on the university’s tennis squad and earned a degree in education. Stuart gave the pro circuit a try, then settled down to a life as an independent tennis instructor.

The group immediately liked Stuart. He had a humorous way about him, and he pushed them by alternately teasing and telling them exactly what to do. Stuart invited me to take part in his drills, so I did. We lined up and hit forehands and backhands, practicing our follow-throughs, topspins, and set-ups.
It seemed to me that everyone in this class was highly motivated. In some ways, I thought of them as an elite group, regardless of age. They moved well, and seemed very capable of sport participation. Even more importantly, each one of these participants presented a “can do” attitude. I found them to be mentally tough. Yet, the stereotypical image of what constitutes an “old” person has not been lost on me. What does it really mean to become old? I found these people were fascinating to me because they break with the stereotype so completely. As a group I found these older participants to be highly intelligent, curious, self-starting, and concerned about movement. They loved to exercise. They loved to stretch, to bend. They even loved to run. Their positive attitudes came through clearly in the way they engaged in this activity.

The Themes

The following categories are the six themes most commonly cited by the participants regarding why they engage in learning and participating in physical activity. They included (a) past sport participation, (b) health, (c) relationships, (d) learning, (e) aging, and (f) personal meaning. As previously mentioned, these themes were derived from interviews, observations, and a personal journal.
Past Sport Participation

The first theme presented is past sport participation. I began by talking about what physical activity meant to these participants during their childhood and young adult years. I asked them to reflect on the kinds of leisure pursuits they engaged in, and why. I thought it was important to know how much support there had been for sport-related activities among their parents and siblings.

The Great Depression affected each of these participants’ families, resulting in an emphasis on work rather than leisure. There was simply a lack of time and money to support expensive sport participation. However, as children, these individuals certainly had the interest, and some opportunity to enjoy a level of physical activity. Among this group, there were some fascinating similarities. For instance, each of these participants once held and are now retired from paying positions outside of the home. The comment was made that having a relatively demanding job required one to continue learning, contributing in some degree to a life-long interest in education in general, and physical activity in particular. Another similarity, interestingly enough, is the fact that while each person had siblings who played with them and a father who
occasionally enjoyed sport, no one could remember their mother actively engaging in sport-related leisure pursuits.

When I asked about her most youthful memories, Thelma told me all about her childhood feelings and experiences regarding sport.

When I was young, I thought how great to be in the Olympics! ‘Course, I never did, we were too poor to do things like that. But, seems to me, I wanted to learn to do things. I wanted to be able to be good at whatever I’m doing. And I know that I’m not all that good, but if I’m in the upper third, that’s fine with me.

From her earliest memories, Thelma told me she had always enjoyed and pursued a variety of physical activities, and tried hard to be proficient at them.

Boy, I remember when we were racing. I was in the 3rd grade. I came in third. I wanted to be first, naturally, but I’m never first. I mean, when you’re short, that’s one handicap. But I came in third; that isn’t too bad.

Thelma enjoyed sports throughout high school and college.

I always did real well in Physical Education in high school. In West Virginia our high school had the only indoor pool at that time in the state. I enjoyed it so much. I was real proud that I could swim underwater back and forth after so many years. I couldn’t even do anything like that now. I kept improving in swimming and then I joined the Red Cross, and I taught some swimming. I got to go to swimming camps that the Red Cross had. I did two different ones. That was fun, but hard work. I enjoyed that.

She went on to say:

I played basketball in high school. I won a silver basketball for coming in second in a foul shooting contest. I was on the team. They didn’t go out of town, it was just intramural. And the same with college. I played
basketball in college. Whatever they had to offer I took up! Yeah, it just
seemed like I wanted to do everything.

Betty was also very active growing up. I asked her to tell me about her
early memories regarding physical activity.

I have four brothers and one sister, and I was always playing. I learned
how to play ball in the street, with stoved fingers. I had to learn how to
catch it, that's all. So I'm used to that. The beginnings are rough, but
you just have to hang in there, practice, and work at it.

Further, she told me:

We were always doing something active. Maybe not any real organized
sports till we hit school, and then we did things in school.

Betty said she had been a softball player in junior high and senior high
school. In later life, although she had tried her hand at a number of activities
including swimming, badminton, and volleyball, she had never played tennis
before this course

Rose has also been active her whole life. As she said:

Well, I've always liked activity. I've always especially been interested in
outdoor activities, so I've done swimming over the years and some
horseback riding and a little bit of tennis. And a very little bit of golf.
Walking is something I do as part of a daily regime. Maybe I don't walk
every day but I certainly do walk at least 3 or 4 times a week.

Growing up in a farm family, Rose emphasize that the focus was primarily
on work.
When we were growing up, we didn’t have a place to go swimming that was very close to where we lived. And so none of us growing up, maybe my brother, but I don’t think any of the rest of us learned to swim when we were home with our parents. So when I went to college was when I started swimming.

She talked about how sports were for herself and other girls growing up in a small country school.

We didn’t have a PE teacher. I liked to dance when I was in high school and that is something that we did do. Square dancing and sometimes other kinds of dancing at lunch times and breaks and things like that. I can’t remember anything that was an organized sport for girls. When I went to college, of course, I took the spectrum of PE courses and that was fun. That was really where I learned to swim.

Charlie talked about the sport he played with his brothers while growing up.

I used to play a lot of tennis when I was a youngster and was never very good. My two brothers were better than I was. When we were kids, about all we did was work. We lived through the Depression, and I had to struggle to get through school and so did my two brothers. And we just spent a lot of time working. We played tennis usually in the evenings, after we got done working. Grandmother had a big lot and father built a tennis court there. It was pretty crude but it worked. It was an old-fashioned clay court and it was pretty dusty and we had trouble with lines. The court was pretty crude and the equipment was pretty crude. Had the old-fashioned wooden racquets. On the clay courts the dust on the ball would wear the strings out pretty fast. I learned to string racquets for myself and my brothers.

In addition to tennis, Charlie discussed his background in handball.

I played a lot of handball. I was pretty good at that. I was kind of lucky because I could use either arm about equally well. I’m naturally left-
handed but the first grade teacher converted me to right hand. With a ruler. She’d tap me on the left hand. I blame that on my terrible handwriting. I suppose of all the sports I’ve been involved in I was probably better at handball than any of them.

In Fred’s case we talked about how having polio may have shaped his attitude toward sport and physical activity. Fred told me that as a child his motivation for engaging in physical activity was to get healthy. He wanted to build up his wasted legs, so he tried to run a lot. Throughout his school years he played football, basketball and baseball. He also ran on the cross-country team one year, but hated it, describing it as “too solitary”.

When I asked Fred to tell me something of his past sport participation, he discussed joining the Air Force out of high school and going overseas.

I went over to Okinawa for a couple of years. That’s where I got to playing more football and basketball and a little volleyball and tennis. So then when I came back from overseas I went to school and played intramural basketball and softball. They didn’t have the tennis so that was the end of that.

I learned that Fred has played sports his whole life, especially team-oriented games such as basketball and softball.

I played until I was probably 35. Then I broke my ankle and that cut the basketball out. So I went to volleyball and played that for a while. When I moved in 1980 I started playing softball again. And I played up until about three years ago. Then I started playing with the seniors and there were too many seniors so you didn’t get to play much. And then I dropped out of that and I started playing tennis last fall.
Some of the participants told me about learning to play sports on their teams at work. As Thelma explained:

When I was working we had a bowling team. We had enough women to have a bowling team, and our team, we started out really bad, but we got into a contest, and there were hundreds of teams. And we won a little money. We came in under 21. I thought that was really just great. Well, see, when I first moved to Ohio I took tap dancing lessons, took ice skating lessons, and I bowled. In West Virginia they finally put a bowling alley in, and I thought, I gotta learn to bowl. They only had three lanes, and there wasn’t anybody there to teach me. I don’t know what happened, my second bowling score, and I never had it since, was 263!

Thelma also learned to play golf at work.

The gal who was chief in charge says, “let’s go play golf,” so I was learning golf, and I enjoyed that. I remember one time she took me out and I was in the sand trap, and (I’m bragging, but this was really great) I hit the ball and it went right in the cup!

Unfortunately, it seemed that working and raising a family as a young woman often got in the way of participating in physical activity. Thelma expressed her thoughts about this:

I had golf clubs but my house caught on fire and it just ruined my golf clubs. So, after I got my two sons, I kind of got busy, you know, working, so I didn’t go back. I bowled a lot. I did a lot of things a lot. And I took them swimming, but I wasn’t able to go golfing as much as I wanted to and I didn’t play tennis as much as I wanted to. I did all these things, you know, when you’re real young you can do a lot more. In college one thing that really excited me was bow and arrow. And we had a contest and it was wonderful, I hit a couple of bird’s eyes! But I don’t do that anymore, either.
Health

One of the themes that came up frequently was the issue of health. For all the participants, concern about their physical well-being was largely what prompted them to first engage in the tennis classes. For Betty, it was initially the additional exercise sought as a preventative measure against the increasing health problems she attributed to aging.

I needed more exercise. I have high cholesterol. I had a physical this year, and the doctor talked to me about the cholesterol, and about starting medication, but, I’m not keen about taking medication, and, well, maybe I should do something about this. So I’ve been watching my diet, and I’ve been walking.

I thought perhaps the doctor had encouraged Betty to get started with something more physical, like tennis. When I asked her about it, she replied,

Well, I probably needed more exercise. I try to get the mile in in less time, and instead of walking twice a week walk three times a week. Or four. Then I thought “walking is kind of boring sometimes”, so I thought “well, gee”, then I read the newsletter and saw the tennis, and thought, “that sounds good!”

We talked about her cholesterol levels being a factor in her pursuit of physical activity. I wanted to know how high her cholesterol level was. Betty replied,

A little high. But I’d been kind of taking a casual approach to watching. This time I made a concentrated effort. I increased the walking and then I thought maybe I needed something more than walking. I read the letter
here and they talked about tennis, and thought, “that sounds good to me”. I didn’t know if I’d have the stamina to do this, but so far I’m enjoying it. Its fun.

Also, now with the health problems, cooking, baking, learning, you know, how I’m going to handle this. There are things I need to stay away from, so what can I substitute? I went to different meetings at the medical hospital, and one was about cholesterol, and making a better choice. I’ve gone back to reading the labels. And trying to make the better choice.

We touched on other topics related to health issues. Betty was very adamant about the importance of exercise in her life. Like some of the others, she almost takes a fatalistic attitude toward the whole concept.

You have to keep going. You have to keep moving. I have a little bit of arthritis and I always think that I’ve got to keep moving. If you stop you’re done.

There’s a point where I get up on Monday mornings and I think, oh, why did I sign up for this? I have to be there and I’m not ready to go. But you get there, and you have a good time, and physically, it takes a little bit out of you. I don’t know if I have the stamina to keep up with this, I don’t intend to be a tennis champ, by any means. But to be able to just play for my enjoyment. And you come home and you find that you feel pretty good. Yeah. You’ve got a good start on the day.

Charlie is convinced that although eventually “we all fall apart”, he thinks he can slow the process through physical activity.

My wife couldn’t get around that much so if we went anywhere we used a wheelchair, so I got a lot of exercise pushing her around. I think a moderate amount of exercise is good for people.
Charlie spoke of his brothers and his thoughts on health, exercise, and aging.

My younger brother died. It’s the tobacco that killed him. My little brother played tournament tennis up until he was age 60, but he’s got a heart condition and his wife is quite sick, so he’s quit playing tennis. He used to be good.

We all get old and fall apart. Believe me, I’m not near as nimble as I used to be. I have trouble seeing the ball, which is a problem I didn’t used to have. When the ball gets close I have trouble zeroing in on it. We all must recognize that as we get older we slow down. There are a lot of things we can’t do. But I guess my philosophy is I’m going to resist slowing down as long as I can.

Again, a fatalistic philosophy emerged from my conversations with Charlie.

Once you stop doing things you vegetate and you’ll go downhill pretty fast. All you have to do is visit these retirement centers and rest homes and see these people who are vegetating. They go to pieces pretty fast. Last week I made the rounds of some of the rest homes with one of our ministers, and stay away as long as you can, is what I say.

Thelma exercises because she loves to move, and also because she fears becoming sick and overweight, like one of her sisters. She appeared to believe exercising helps her feel better overall.

I probably have some arthritis. At different times I feel achy and that sort of thing. But after I exercise I don’t feel that way anymore. It just goes away.

My sister says, and I feel sorry for her because she’s way overweight, and she can’t walk very well, she says, “where do you get all of that
strength from?” You know? But I guess if you keep exercising, you keep your strength up, it's going to be a lot better for you. For your life, for the years ahead. I think. I hope!

I, you know, I'm not ready to go! My brother says “you’re in good shape. You’ll live to 95 or something.” Well, I had a grandmother who was 95, my mother was 93, my brother was 90. On the other hand, my dad died at the age of 63. I know that my cholesterol is high, and that bothers me. I have a doctor check it periodically. She says it must be in the genes or something. So I figure if you do a lot of exercise it will help you bring that down. I don’t know if that’s true or not.

I take B-12 shots. I started them many years ago. Just seems like I was always catching a cold, always getting kind of tired or something. They help you. Give you more energy, I think. I think that's the main thing.

Uh, I'm ready to stop at the end of the hour. Going over and picking up our balls gives you a little rest.

I read a lot about health and nutrition and exercise, and weight-lifting is supposed to be good for you. I don’t know how good. I just do seven or eight different things, and bike three times a week. And I’m not as flabby! They kept saying that you’ll gain weight, but you’ll lose the fat. And I thought, “well that’s for me!”. That’s true. So I don’t know, I did gain some weight. The first year I retired, this is only the third year, I was very unhappy that I’d retired. Because that’s all I knew, was work. And then I didn’t feel good, I got the flu or something, and then the third thing that happened to me was I broke two ribs. And that’s when I lost a lot of weight. I couldn’t eat! I couldn’t move! And I was really glad I lost that weight, but I’ve gained it all back. I finally got to eating. I feel like I’m at least, I don’t think I should be over 110, and I’m 125. I think that’s too much for me. Every magazine that I get a hold of, I go right to the exercise portion.

Oh, the only thing I feel is that I know it makes me feel better afterwards, the exercise. Some days when I stay home, it’s very easy just to sit and watch television. Unless I just turn it off and go do something else. But everybody says when you exercise you feel better and I tried to pay
attention to that, and it really does make you feel better. Your body feels better. You don’t feel sluggish, that sort of thing.

You know, if you don’t exercise everything you do is on a slower pace, and maybe you don’t feel as strong. I have a sister. I have several, but this one in particular is way overweight. She has a hard time walking so I’m doing a lot of things for her. Helping her clean her house and grocery shopping, and you name it. She says “how can you do that? You’re really strong, aren’t you?” And I say “well, I really don’t feel that I’m really strong, but I guess I must be with all the exercise”. It just has kept me going and when I feel like I don’t want to do something, then I think about her and I think, “no, I can’t be like her. I’ve got to keep going”

There’s so much emphasis on TV, on radio, people talk in magazines, the whole works on people’s health. People need to get off the couch and do something. There is so much emphasis on it that you can’t help but want to do that also. I seem to be a person that if somebody is doing something that looks interesting, I want to do that, too. Or if I read a magazine and it has some exercises in it, which they all do, I want to try that out and see if it helps. And then I feel like I know I’m really short and I know that I should be at least ten pounds lighter than I am. And so I strive for that sometimes. I say, “well, if I do all of this maybe it will help”. You’ve got to be active, especially if you want to live a long time.

I know back to my sister again, since she’s so heavy and she can’t move so fast she’s beginning to forget. She says “how do you remember all this?” And I thought “how do I remember all these things?” Is it because I make myself remember or is it because the activities I’m involved with keeps your blood flowing and you’re able to remember better? I don’t know. I thought about that a lot.

Because of his illness as a child, Fred became aware early on of the importance of keeping his body strong. When I asked him how he got started
with the tennis classes, he told me he was taking them “just to keep in shape”.

He explained,

When I was a kid I had polio and I’ve always been aware of how important health can be. It regulates your life and what you can do to a large degree. So I’ve always tried to keep in shape ever since I was a kid. I had polio when I was eight or ten. Lost a couple of years in school but I was fortunate that they caught it in time. Plus the therapies of Sister Kenny helped me. It allowed me to grow up pretty well. I was real sick as a baby and I don’t know whether it was the time in the Depression era or whether it was just my circumstances. But anyway, I outgrew it, I guess.

When I asked Fred if there were any remnants or repercussions of the disease he told me,

The only thing I can see is my legs are rather thin. I don’t know whether that’s my natural build or whether that was due to the problem, but when I went into the hospital they didn’t know what it was. But my grandmother was a midwife and she knew there was a problem because of the inflammation and the temperature. So they went through the spinal tap and then the next summer I started limping and falling, so that led them to believe they didn’t get it all out. And then I went into therapy for a year or so. They had me in a big cast and they’d tie me in every night. You don’t realize how bad it is at the time.

Now my knees are bad and I’m getting into a health condition or two. So I’m really aware of my health and what I have to do myself. The responsibility to myself and what I eat and how I take care of myself.

I never smoked. Well, I tried it once. But, all of the coaches always said “no smoking”. They say it’s not good for you. It cuts your wind down. I believe it. Yeah, sure. It’s a proven fact. I believed my coach and that was it. My body was a host and I tried not to do anything to hurt it.
But then after I got out of school I got into playing a little bit more. I felt I needed it. Some people have to, everybody has to do something. But I still wanted to keep in shape. I wasn’t as food conscious as I am now back in the 50’s. I took the four basic food groups and tried to stick with that. I didn’t overindulge. When I came out of the service I weighed about 212 and I still had decent speed, but when I was overseas we did a lot of weight-lifting. And then when I came back it turned to slob so I got rid of it. And I got down to 195 and then four years ago I went to a health test down at the library. They gave me that specific gravity test and said I should keep down to 175. I did that in two years.

I don’t know if it’s genes or my effort. But without one the other wouldn’t help, either. If I didn’t have good genes and I didn’t try to improve myself I wouldn’t do anything. But if I did try and improve and the genes weren’t there it wouldn’t make any difference.

Rose and I discussed the meaning of exercise and the effect physical activity might have on her health. I asked the question “do you think playing tennis or being involved in other physical activities have any implications on your physical well-being? Rose answered similarly to the others, believing that physical activity contributes significantly to her overall feeling of well-being.

Well, all the doctors say so. Especially as you grow older you need to keep on moving and exercising and using your body. I’m all for that.

To tell you the truth if I just sit around the house all day I don’t think I do feel as good as if I get out and walk or do something, and my body tells me that it wants to move. I think that physical activity is as good as a shot in the arm.

Rose talked about a previous injury, and how physical activity affected it.
I didn’t play tennis right after I hurt my back. I just thought that maybe that was something that would be bad for it. So I probably didn’t play tennis hardly at all for at least two years. I don’t see that playing tennis the way I am is making my back any worse than it is any other time. I haven’t really noticed that.

Well, you know the worst thing it seems I can do for my back is to just sit around. That is really hard on it. So I know from experience that I need to move and stretching probably is a good thing. Moving and stretching. A lot of bending maybe isn’t real great for it but I haven’t noticed it hurting a lot when I bend over to pick up the ball and stuff.

Committed to the idea of moving, Rose is all for extending the length of the lessons.

I would run out of energy after a while, I suppose, but I think I could handle [tennis] an hour and a half at least, or maybe two hours if it doesn’t get hot.

**Relationships**

Another theme that came up frequently was the subject of relationships with other people. When I asked Rose what initially got her interested in participating in the tennis class, she explained that her daughter was primarily responsible for encouraging her in this new undertaking. The daughter told her it would be fun and would provide them with an additional opportunity to spend time together. So even though Rose lived over an hour’s drive from the tennis site, she began the lessons, always driving to her daughter’s house the night before. Rose explained that the two of them would have supper together,
and usually spend much of the evening talking and laughing before retiring to bed. After the next morning’s tennis lesson was over, they would often spend at least part of the afternoon swimming, shopping, and enjoying each other’s company before Rose left for home. For Rose, the chance to interact with her daughter seemed to be the primary rationale and motivation for her tennis participation.

Rose thinks of herself as a “people person,” and likes being with others. She told me she prefers activities that include other people the most. Although she knew none of the other tennis players before her involvement, Rose told me she enjoyed the other members of the class, and felt accepted by them right away.

I noticed that even though she was the last member to join the group, she was able to fit right in with the rest of the students. It seemed to me that within a few minutes time Rose had become “one of the gang.”

We talked about whether relationships with others had increased or enhanced her sport participation. Rose confirmed that they had, and spoke about how important this was and still is for her. She remembered how her children loved to ski in the winter, and told a story about how the kids tried to encourage their parents to learn the sport themselves. The children argued and
pleaded to no avail throughout their years in high school and college.

Unfortunately, the parents believed they were “too old” to learn such a new and risky activity. It wasn’t until the children, then grown adults, had left the nest that Rose and her husband came to the conclusion that they could, indeed, learn to ski. They were in their fifties.

I just remember that the kids were gone and this ski club was forming at Cooper’s and my husband said “come on, let’s be a part of this.” And it just seemed like for the first time we really had the time. We had the extra money. We just went ahead and did it. They were going to go every week and so, when my husband said “well, you know, how about if we do this, too?” That’s all it took for me. I think he might have been the one that was a little more definite that he wasn’t going to start at his age, so when he said that it was fine with me. So it tells you that age didn’t really have anything to do with it. It must have had a little more to do with the fact that maybe there were some other people that we knew that maybe were close to our age group, and at least some them were just learning. Maybe suddenly we thought “well, if they can do it we can do it, too!” We found out that we had fun when we went up. We had fun socially, too, with young people that we knew. It was an outside sport and we both liked anything out of doors. Plus maybe once we caught the bug a little bit we could envision some family vacations where we would all enjoy skiing. We did get to do that a little bit.

Although it was never her primary reason for deciding to join the tennis class, Betty seemed to enjoy the interaction with the other learners immensely. She rarely missed a lesson, and was always ready to do things outside of the course with members of the group. The social factors seemed to become more
important to her than perhaps she realized they would. Her athletic daughter is the one who prompted her to join the tennis class. Betty commented,

She thinks its good that I’m doing this, because she’s [her daughter] the first one who said to me “you don’t have any physical exercise”.

I’ll really have to inquire as to whether they’ll give group lessons, if the center doesn’t take care of it I’ll have to see whether there are private lessons and find someone just to play with, to hit it back and forth with. Maybe somebody who is on equal footing or maybe a little better who will challenge me.

So this has been sort of an effort on my part to be a little aggressive and start out and ask questions. I didn’t know the people in this class. I joined the center a year ago specifically to walk. And that was all I did. You just have to say hi, my name is...and start in. But they’ve all been really nice. It’s been good.

Charlie was a man who had very little to say about personal relationships. He was, however, very well informed about what was going on in the world. He seemed much more concerned with things, events, problems, religion, and government than he did with people. Charlie had strong views concerning taxes, gun control, and the EPA. He enjoyed arguing his point, especially if the subject involved environmental issues or matters of the church. While he did not speak much about relationships and the meaning people have in his life, I got the sense that the overriding reason he so faithfully attended the tennis lessons was because he liked being a part of the group. This was especially obvious in light of the fact that Charlie was a rather
advanced player who did not believe he had or ever could learn anything new. And yet, he never missed a lesson.

Charlie has lived alone since his wife died several years ago. At first a recluse, now he frequently dates an assorted number of widows. While he spoke of no plans to remarry, he seeks and enjoys the companionship of women. Once, after a lesson, he hurriedly walked off the court, explaining he needed to go home in order to get ready to meet a certain lady for lunch. I teased him a little, and his eyes sparkled as he smiled and disclosed that he had a second date that night with a different lady! He laughed at my surprised response, then poignantly explained how it made him feel to sit at home night after night by himself. A practical man who believes he has a choice about his destiny, Charlie said "you can't outguess the future. Things happen that you never anticipate." Instead of feeling sorry for himself after losing his wife, Charlie opted for a proactive stance toward his social life. While he might not admit it, this attitude, I believe, propelled him into the tennis class.

Charlie revealed that in addition to the tennis classes he also participated once a week on a bowling team. While he outwardly minimized his own personal accomplishments, level of ability, and the learning of new skills, his sport groups appeared to be very important to him. When I asked him
about this, he said "you get to know people through sports faster than through any other activity," indicating his strong desire to connect with people.

There were sometimes inconsistencies with the things Charlie told me. Although he once related how much he likes the thrill of competition, he later contradicted himself by saying it didn’t matter to him at all. As he said,

Winning isn’t that important to me. I’m doing it primarily for the exercise and camaraderie. I enjoy being with people.

Charlie made sure I understood that the bowling was a “group”, and not a “league,” where competition with other teams and leagues is an integral part of the experience. He explained that “We just bowl and enjoy the time”. But later, when discussing the tennis, he said:

To improve my game I think I need to play more competitively. In the groups I’ve been playing, I’ve been knocking it back so that the person can get to it. Takes away your competitive instinct.

I wondered if perhaps at 84, Walter experienced difficulty in locating similarly competitive peers. Perhaps he was willing to give up a certain level of competition in order to become an accepted member of the group.

Fred explained that as a child he developed a friendship with one of the sisters involved in the treatment of his disease. He remembered how Sister Kenny helped him overcome his polio with physical therapy. He remained very appreciative of her efforts. Then, in grade school, his peers got him involved in
basketball and baseball. He related how these cohorts taught him how to play sports.

When I was a kid we’d go down to the park and we’d get three bats, two balls, and six gloves for twenty guys. So we’d go down. We’d have our fights and guys would walk off and take their gloves but still, somebody would tell you something you did wrong. Get down in front of the ball. Don’t let it get through you. That’s the biggest sin. They’d tell you to run around the bases, hit with your outside foot. And you always watched the best player, too. Just watched what he did whenever he did it and try and learn from that.

Then I got on some softball teams at the church and I started coaching as my kids grew up. This was a small town in eastern Ohio, population about 30,000, and we played all sports with the same guys all the time. A couple clubs got together and we’d have picnics and play out there and then we had inner church league for the softball, basketball.

I asked Fred if he had fun being around the same guys.

Oh yeah. I had so much in common with them, and it was a small town and I knew all the guys. I went there to college, and I had a family, two children, and I had a job, and I tried to get some sports in but I couldn’t get too much in. All I got in was intramural basketball. Once or maybe twice a week. But with all the other things I had to do it got real tight.

I tried to find out who was the most important person involved with shaping his attitude toward physical activity. I asked him specifically about his high school coach, and whether he had been an influential person in Fred’s life.

No, because he didn’t like me! I just took him serious, that’s all. I just believed him.
Fred came across as very independent, even a loner in some respects. Yet, he continued to appear at the tennis lessons even though his skills were far beyond what we were being taught. It was evident that he enjoyed being a part of this group. He mentioned how difficult it was to find people to do things with. From our conversations and my observations, it appeared to me that Fred was a man who was using sport to find the human relationships which would contribute positively to his life, as well as to his sport experience.

Fred stated:

I have a friend who had the [softball] team and they were looking for pitchers, so I played pitcher for three, four years. Then the team disbanded and I went to the senior league. But it didn’t work out too well. Then I decided I needed something, and tennis was something where people were always there for that one reason. You didn’t have to get a bunch of guys together to do that so that’s why I chose tennis.

Thelma was a person who was highly motivated by interactions with other people. She liked people, and enjoyed being around and doing things with them. She spoke of how important it was to join a class in order to meet people who have similar interests. The reason she joined the tennis course in the first place was because one of the other women from the center coaxed her. Unfortunately, this woman dropped out after the course was underway. But by that time Thelma had already gotten familiar with the others in the group, and felt connected to them. Thelma remarked:
Well, I wanted to get back into tennis. And there are people to play with, I mean you can’t go play tennis unless it’s with a partner. This way you get to know a few people. And those who are really interested in keeping it up, we can go to [park] after our class finishes up.

I like to do things with people, although I don’t mind doing things by myself. Like ice skating. But in the ice skating I took classes. I don’t mind doing things alone, but I do like to be with people.

Everybody [in the tennis class] is new to me. They’re very nice people.

She [Mary] says, “are you going to sign up for tennis?” I said, “are you?” She said “yeah!” so I said “ok!” I said “I don’t have a tennis racket”, and she said, “oh, I’ll get you one”. And that was good.

I’ve heard people say, “if I try to do this at home I’ll probably end up not doing it”. So it’s easier to go to a class and get it done. Other people make a difference. And then you begin to know a few people, and you learn something about them, and you think, “well, I’m glad that they’re coming, because they really need it!” And I think “that’s good!” They don’t do it too well, but at least they come and they work at it, and I think that’s important.

In the aerobics class people are beginning to know each other, and they’ll come. Like one of them said to me, “where’ve you been?” I said, “well, I’m trying to get ready to go for my trip”. “Where you going?” So I told her. “How neat!” So forth and so on. So, I mean, at the beginning of the aerobics class, I didn’t know anybody. But eventually you learn the people. And the Malibu group is a real friendly group. They make you feel at home immediately. ‘Course we meet week in and week out.

I asked how she got involved.

My mom-in-law always came to the Whetstone Park to look at the roses, she loved flowers. So, when I heard there was a festival on, I thought, I’ll go. I came by myself and looked at all the beautiful flowers and saw the group that was tap dancing, or whatever they were doing, and I said,
“well, I’ll just go see the rest of it”. And I saw this place and I had never seen it before. I was curious to find out what kind of place it was. I didn’t know what it was! And there weren’t too many people, and I walked in that door, and Brant was there. He started talking to me and talked me into joining. I said, “well, that’s fine, I don’t mind racing because I’m familiar with Bobby Rahal”. My son and I had gone to Indiana once to the Indy 500. And, I thought, “well, I don’t know if I can do this”. But they talked me into joining up, so I did.

You get to learn people and you make friends and suddenly you can say hello to quite a number of people that you’ve met in your different classes and that sort of thing. And I think that’s important rather than to be by yourself. I find that it’s helpful, and yesterday, I went to the grocery store. Somebody was in my investments class and they come up and talked to me. Normally I’m in the grocery store and I don’t talk to anybody. But that was fun, knowing someone. I think that part is meaningful. Getting to know people and getting to be a part of somebody’s group or whatever. You have to be part of people, part of a class.

We started talking about Thelma’s sister, who is overweight, ill, and needs help.

Well, I know I have to help her. I don’t regret helping her. I would help her anyway. And I feel like I’m glad I’m able to do what I can for her, because she had a son but he lives out of town so that’s no help. And I have two sons and one son is married, but he’s very willing to help my sister, but I don’t call him too often for any help or anything. I just, I know I want more time for myself to do things that I have to do but I will do things for her first because people need help and you just can’t ignore them. You can’t help everybody but your family does come first.

But that was fun. You had a new friend and you were able to talk with people. I think that it’s nice to have an after activity once in a while, not all the time. Because people have other things to do.
I enjoy it and you make friends and you’re able to talk about things. And the first thing you know your day is so filled you wonder when am I going to have time to do the next thing?

**Learning**

The theme of learning came up quite frequently. One of the things I found to be true was that each and every one of the participants was interested in education. They were not afraid to try something new, a trait which, I think, made them unique. I asked Betty if she had ever played tennis before.

No! And I’ve never quilted before, either. I’ve just taken on two new activities.

Betty remembered being a good student, and liking school and the opportunity to learn. She told me she had maintained this love of learning throughout the years. She could not understand how a person might not want to be interested in and learn new things.

There has to be things out there, you have to have some interests. I remember my daughter being good friends with a girl in her class. She was always bored. Her shoulders would be sort of rounded and her head down. I’d ask her how was camping, how was her vacation, and she’d say “boring”. I guess I don’t understand that. I don’t understand how someone could be bored.

We talked about the different styles of teaching, and what has helped her the most as a learner. We discussed the tennis instruction we are receiving from Stuart and Mark.
Mark and Stuart are both good. I think they have little different styles, but, what I noticed with both of them is that they tell you what you do right, and they tell you what you do wrong. And they did that with each of us. Plus they are kind of fun. And its not like school where you HAVE to learn something, this is a fun thing to do! And if you miss 'em, you miss 'em!.

Betty found the instruction more comfortable and "less serious" than what she experienced during her school days. She was happy with our instructors' more casual demeanor.

I like their approach. They're still a little serious underneath, but they're still relaxed. Maybe its better to have a relaxed manner and go by first names.

When I asked her why this would be better, she said:

Oh, because it is a very casual class. If you said Mr. and Mrs., people might feel sort of stiff and a little older. Whereas, here you are with a physical activity, and its fun, its not like any classroom. Its fun.

We talked about learning as an older adult. She felt that learning a physical activity made her feel more confident, physically and mentally. She also told me she felt she was just as good of a learner now as ever, except that the speed of her ability to learn may have changed.

Maybe a little slower. Maybe taking a little more time for soaking in and remembering, but yes.
Learning, for Jenny, appeared to be a self-actualizing experience. When I asked her why more older adults did not involve themselves with learning physical activity, she replied,

Well, I think with all the senior citizen centers offering things, it's almost like, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. I think people have to sort of have this, have the interest, they have to have the communication, the desire.

I asked Betty what she thought of the saying, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." She quickly replied, "I'll bite 'cha on the leg!"

Thelma has learned aerobics, weight-lifting, ice-skating, race car driving, and golf as an adult. I asked her if she liked to learn.

Oh yes! I love to learn different things. I remember when I was young I played tennis. I don't remember ever having had a tennis instructor when I was young so there are things now like rules, for example, and different methods of holding your racket and how to approach the ball and all that sort of thing. Yes, I'm learning a lot, actually.

We talked about her school days. I asked Thelma if she always loved school, and whether she had been a good student.

Well, I must have, because I kept going out for different things. I didn't mind. I love learning languages, I love music. And I like sports.

Thelma and I talked about her teachers in school. She reflected that she liked school, and had always gotten along well with her instructors.

Well, I don't remember the names, but we had a basketball teacher who was also coach of everything else. We had a small school. I remember
he worked us really hard. He worked us as hard as professionals, I think, at that time. I remember, you know when you're young you perspire a lot, and he says, "Thelma, turn around" so I did, and he said, "now that's what I want you to do! See how she's perspiring?!" In college, no one could swim except me, so I was the assistant instructor. I thought that was neat. I liked that teacher, too. I always, always, enjoyed all of my teachers. They usually gave some good advice, and good learning techniques and everything. Usually got along with people pretty well.

I asked Thelma if she thought teachers were better when strict or friendly. I also asked her to discuss the kind of interaction that helped her learn the most.

Well, if the teachers were strict, and I'm sure I had quite a number of them, I thought that was good because that was the way of learning better. And since I liked what I was doing it didn't bother me that they were strict. Most of the teachers that I knew were friendly enough as well as really good instructors. It never bothered me and I never got angry at whatever was being done.

Thelma told me her opinion of Stuart, our tennis instructor.

Oh, I like his instruction, I think he is very good. I like Mark, too, but I like the way Stuart takes us one by one and he keeps us going, we don't stand around. I like that very much. I think he is good. I don't know too much about him. But I enjoyed it.

Well, the first time we had instructions for the whole hour. That was good, for the first time. The second hour he couldn't take care of us because he had a lesson already. So we just played and tried to remember what we learned. But, with Stuart, half an hour and half an hour playing, I think that's good, because you learn something and then you can apply what you learned the second half.
The first thing I did when I started teaching was bike. I wanted to bike so I bought a bike. I was able to buy a bike. And a friend of mine and I did a lot of biking. And then we moved to Arlington. My brother, much younger, was teaching my uncle, who was helping my dad, how to drive a car. Somehow something went wrong and they ran over my bike! So I hadn't had one until a few years ago; my son bought me a bike. And maybe I lost a little. It seems to be a little tall for me, so I kinda have to relearn my biking experience. I think it was the fact that I haven't learned to do biking again, maybe I'm afraid or something. Because when I took my first year of ice skating, I thought it was so good. Then I fell and broke my wrist. So I've been leery of doing anything real fast. But I'm getting back into it. First, its kind of funny to start at this age, to do all these things.

When I asked her about the importance of learning physical activity she said:

Well, I mean you can’t do your sports until you know how to do it. And when you have an instructor and he tells you what to do, or she tells you what to do, it just, well, I just want to excel in that so I follow every word that they give me to how to do it. I mean there’s no point in doing your various sports if you don’t know how to do it. And I find it isn’t all that difficult for me. I’m not all that good, but, you know, I can learn easily.

I asked Thelma if she had always picked things up quickly, and if that had changed with age.

I think so. I don’t know. I seem to. Almost. I’m sure it isn’t the same 100%. But almost.

My folks were from Lebanon, so we studied Arabic. We learned it at home. My dad taught us. We used it a lot until he got into college and then we went back to the English at home. I had a cousin who was in charge of Arabic and other languages at the University of Michigan. His brother-in-law was learning, and when he got his Ph.D. he got a job
here at Ohio State. So Matt and I went to classes. We took some night classes in Arabic for two or three years. Learning the higher up language, which is almost different than how to write and read, is very difficult. I spent, after supper up until twelve, every night, just studying. I made good grades. It was hard. But if you don't keep it up, if you don't keep ANYTHING up, you won't remember as well.

I asked if her parents had stressed learning.

No. My dad was too busy working in the store, mom was busy taking care of the kids.

We talked about how she must have really applied herself in school.

Thelma replied:

Yeah, everything they had to offer I wanted to do. I just seem like I want to do everything! And I don't know whether that's good or bad.

When I asked Thelma what she thought of the saying, you can't teach an old dog new tricks, she said:

Well, I think that's good for some people, but not for me! I can learn! I read as much as I can but I don't read that much. I read because I want to learn.

When I asked her how teachers should treat adult students, Thelma replied:

Well, they should know that they're adults, and up in age, and treat them a little bit differently than they would just regular students.

Like in the aerobics program, they go at our rate of speed. And do things they know would not be very harmful to us. I know that in my French class, Teresa, she teaches it not like, no grades or anything like that. Just works with us and the book and that sort of thing. And if you
get it fine, and if you don’t, fine. I mean eventually you’ll get it. They should pay attention to the age because everybody can’t work at the same speed. Whether its exercise or investment. I mean, they talk, if you don’t want to talk, you just want to listen, that’s fine. I think that’s good, because you’re there to learn but you’re not there to have a grade or anything. And I think just to get a smattering of something will awaken your mind, and eventually, if you want to continue at that rate, that’s fine, too.

Stuart is telling us about tennis. And all about the various parts of it that you need to know. He doesn’t - maybe he is dealing with us as older people but I’ve never seen evidence of it. When I stand still when I should be running to meet the ball and he mentions something about that it didn’t dawn on me whether he was teaching the younger, middle age, or older person. I just never thought about it.

I mean that’s good. There is no - I don’t think there’s any point - if you’re going to go out for tennis and he’s going to teach it we have to think about tennis and his teaching and forget that we’re whatever age we happen to be and that sort of thing.

To learn a lot you have to do a lot of reading about it [investments]. And it could get very boring, I guess. I think physical activity is a lot more fun than investments but I go to it so I can know what’s going on, and I take French. French, it was my minor and I actually taught a little bit, but you forget so this helps you to remember a lot. I took Arabic classes with my son when he was around fifteen. We went at night when they had them, and of course I had learned it with my father and mother before I went to school. Well, on my trip I found out I could remember a lot more and it kept coming back and I would talk to waiters and guides and this one little boy that ran across the field, he was the son of somebody, they had about 500 camels in that herd and when I started talking to him in Arabic, he understood me. I thought, oh boy! My Arabic is coming back. So you know if you’re active, why, it helps your brain power.
The way he taught us, I thought it was very good. When we’d miss the ball, he’d say “don’t go away, come back!”, and gave us another chance. I thought that was really good. He didn’t get upset or angry because we didn’t do it, you know. Because, after all, everybody that’s in the tennis class used to play tennis. They’re back to learning. And the same way with French. Some of us had French, in fact I even taught French when I was young, but I got away from it. The same with Arabic and the same with investments. Its just something that, you know, if you don’t do anything, if you’re an adult and just forget, you just sit in front of the TV, I mean, things are lost. You’ve got to get involved with a lot of different things so you know what’s going on. You don’t have to be smart, just aware of what’s happening. And, uh, that’s what I’m doing. I just couldn’t see myself sitting at home and doing nothing. ‘Course, in my last five years of work, my son got our company started on the computer, and I learned how to work with computers. It was very difficult. First it was just like magic. How could that happen?! And finally we got a fax, and got all these different things, and it was all new. It was all new, you had to learn, and I was learning. No, I think teaching older people, whoever the teachers are, ought to be aware of their ages and that not everybody can learn at the same rate, and if they work and see that people are interested, then that’s what it’s all about. Just to be active. Just to enjoy life. After all that work! You know, it wouldn’t bother me if I worked. I’d go back to work. But I don’t want to because I’m having too much fun doing these other things!

Well, he [Stuart] keeps talking, he knows what he’s saying. I mean, as you hit the ball he’ll make a remark about how you did it or what you should do or whatever. I guess he’s taught long enough to be able to do that. And that’s very good.

He’s specific about what is going on. He’s very good, I didn’t expect him to be that good.

Well, I think teaching adults is easier. You may have a problem with controlling the children. Half of your time you’re not teaching. And teaching adults, I mean, you have a chance to talk to them for the whole hour or whatever it is. Because the adults who go to that class want to learn. They’re interested and it’s not a class that they have to go to, like
children in school. So it's easier to work with adults, because the ones that go are the ones that are interested. They haven't asked somebody to go who didn't want to go.

In the investment class, there's a lot of good comments. And they talk about things, and they give their viewpoints, which is really good, to see how different people do things. And no one ever argues against anything. And in the aerobics class, even though most people would prefer a live instructor, they're very happy with the tape because so far, there's been not less than fifteen that come. And they know that they need to do that.

I asked Fred, who is somewhat taciturn on subjects which don't include objects or actions, who or what helped him the most to learn physical activity.

Fred succinctly stated: "Just doing it."

Fred was a very self-motivated man, and this extended, it appeared, to his learning. He took responsibility for teaching himself what he most wanted to know. We talked about this.

Now, on this tennis thing, when I started it I went down to the library and I'll bet you I've been through 20 of the tapes they have in the library. If you want to do something you have to teach yourself. It doesn't just happen. You see these baseball players and football players and tennis players. This morning this guy is out here hitting the ball. He won't practice. That's what you have to do. One in a million can go out and be a star like Michael Jordan or Montana, but that's the exception. If you want to be a dentist you don't just open a shop and start digging!

I asked Fred what kind of person helped him learn the best.

A person that I feel easy with. I don't like to take direction. That's why I didn't stay in the service. You have to take a little to learn anything,
but as far as sports are concerned someone that can see what I’m doing wrong and can tell me in a way that’s not offensive to me. I’m sure that’s the same thing for everybody else, too. Anything they learn somebody had to - your teacher or instructor had to tell you in a certain way that inspires you, you want yourself to accept that information. Just like our instructor this morning was very encouraging and calm and instructive, and I liked him.

He’s very personable and he always gets out the big picture. That’s for everybody that was there this morning. He always had a good comment for everything that he did.

In a nice way that doesn’t ruffle your feathers. First of all it’s a little easier because you’re both on the same level.

A good one [teacher] will [talk to you on the same level] and if he won’t then he’s not going to be your instructor very long because people just gravitate away. But I think you have to be yourself. You just can’t go out there and say I’m going to learn this or that. If you’re in that class, chances are you’re there for a reason and you’re open to suggestions or instructions. So the instructor has an easier task because he has that way with the student. The student is willing to put the time in.

The adult student is there because they want to learn. But [for kids] it is peer pressure. It is probably far greater, and that teaches the kids. Because if they see a guy dunk then that’s something they have to do. They’re going to watch and see how he does it. Or if he swings for the home run or he bunts he’s going to look and see. There is some instruction involved but a lot of times kids have a stake with their peers. You can teach kids things without having a rigid structure. A good coach will do that.

I’ve always had a racket and I go and hit against the wall, I can hit a ball good but I don’t know how to play the court in tennis. I can hit the ball but I don’t know the strategy involved in tennis. So that’s why I haven’t been able to do too well, but I’m getting better at it now. Court time is important in tennis.
I'm self-teaching commodity investment. Yeah, I'm sending away for different books. If you don't like the book you just return it. I read some books down at the library but most of them are old. Things change.

In a nutshell, Fred's philosophy was this:

Life is learning. You learn something everyday. You have to to survive. You learn just through interacting with people.

I asked Charlie how he learned to play tennis.

Oh, we just went out and played. I never had a lesson. That's what I told the pro. Seventy years ago you could have helped me. I don't think he can help me very much now. Maybe a little bit but not very much. My habits and my strokes are so well ingrained, I've done them so long changing now would be pretty difficult.

One thing he said is "follow through." I think that could help me if I keep it in mind.

Charlie described what he thought were the characteristics of a good teacher. He told me about his volunteering experiences, and all about the problems he had noticed in schools. Charlie thought teachers have no time to teach. He saw this first hand, he said, by working as a tutor in one of the city schools. He went on to tell me about the traits and characteristics he remembered of his favorite and least favorite teachers.

One of the favorite teachers I had in grade school made the subject interesting, and didn't brow-beat anybody. It was a fun class. We all enjoyed it. Good teachers are careful not to brow-beat the kids.
One of the worst teachers I had talked for 30 minutes without inhaling. Turned me off. Instead, this teacher ought to have taken a rest and asked questions of the audience.

The teacher has got to love the kids, particularly in the lower grades and it doesn't take a Master's degree or a Ph.D. The teacher has got to like the kids of that age. And the teacher has got to have good teaching material. In the case of [name of school] the teaching material that they have I think is terrible. I can't even understand the damn stuff myself! I don't know how the kids understand it.

When I asked Charlie to describe a good teacher for older adults, he told me:

He's got to have a lot of enthusiasm. I think that's probably the secret to things. He's got to have a lot of enthusiasm and that kind of rubs off on the kids, the adults. He's got to know his subject. He can't be a Chinese TA!

Both my boys experienced Chinese teachers in mathematics. My older son got through it because he was real good at it. Gary, the younger one, said "Dad, I can't understand a word the guy is saying". Of course he flunked mathematics and lost a year in college.

The attitude of many of the professors is bad. For the professor to really establish a reputation he must teach Ph.D.s. They don't like to teach undergraduates. They like to go up the ladder.

In distinguishing a good teacher from a bad one Charlie explained:

Most of it is enthusiasm. Knowledge of subject matter. The combination gets the message over to the students. But he has to speak English, too!

He did not seem to think he had learned anything in the tennis classes.

About our lessons Charlie had this to say:
I’m not sure that we’ve really had lessons. The only thing I’ve gotten out of it so far is follow through. That’s one of the weaknesses that I’ve had. We [used to] just play. It’s only been in the last 40-45 years that tennis has become a fashionable sport. Had class. Had moves. Where you have to study the game and find out the right way to play the game. Before that people just up and played.

I asked Charlie what motivated him to learn new things. He insisted he had not learned anything.

Really I haven’t learned. This is something old. I really haven’t learned any new physical activities. Bowling and tennis, I did those 40, 50 years ago, so I really haven’t learned any new ones.

Even though I wasn’t making much headway, I continued to prod Charlie by trying a new tack, asking him about experiences outside of sport he may have recently undertaken or learned. Charlie thought for a moment, then replied:

This work with the [school]. That’s new. I’m on the third year. They put out an appeal for volunteers, and so I responded. I was interested in learning what the [city] school district was like and it’s been an education.

In dealing with young kids, it takes just a little spark to keep them from becoming a drag on society, to turn them into a productive member of society.

I’m active in four different engineering organizations. Keeps me involved. Technology in engineering is changing so fast you have to run to keep up, and I’ve kind of lost some ground the last few years.
I don’t learn like I used to. Lost my concentration. But I try to keep going. I don’t watch TV except for the news. Read lots of engineering magazines. I’m just fascinated by what the government is doing.

Charlie mentioned some negative factors about the tennis class.

We don’t have enough people participating and the skill level between some of us is too great, frankly. Some are easily better than I am, and one of the girls is pretty good, but the others are not that good so we don’t have a mix of skill levels that are compatible.

I asked him about our instructor, Stuart.

He’s pretty good. They’ve gone through this modern training, whatever it is. They know how tennis should be played. Got the right strokes and what you should do. Like most sports there’s a right and wrong way to do it. Scientists have got involved in it. They’ve studied it. Like in bowling, they actually have machines that test the balls and pins. It’s all been studied and described.

He’s not working with a group that can respond very fast.

Yeah, I like both of them [Stuart and Mark]. They’re both doing the best they can with us old fogies.

I asked Charlie to explain the differences between teaching adults and teaching children. He replied:

I expect that the teacher needs to teach them right in the beginning, whether they’re kids or whether they’re adults. There’s a right way to hold the racquet. You’ve got to decide whether you’re going to use two hands or one on the back hand.

Whatever the game you’ve got to learn how to do that [fundamentals]. Serving is another thing. There’s a right and a wrong way to serve. Real good players of course jump up in the air. Most players keep their feet
on the ground. I'd teach them the right way from the beginning regardless of whether they're kids or adults.

I asked Charlie whether he thought he might try to learn any new activities.

If I move to Florida, I'll probably take up golf because the kind of grass they have down there doesn't bother me.

Again, Charlie reiterated:

Really I'm not learning much of anything new. I'm just trying to hold on to what I've got.

My attention span has grown too short for much reading. I do read engineering magazines. I read the Bible some. After I read 10-15 minutes I get sleepy or lose my concentration. When I was young I could read a book straight through. I can't begin to do that now.

We talked for a while about why Charlie's two sons never played sports. He said they were not coordinated enough. It was interesting to learn that he believed the ability to learn is very connected to inborn physiological capabilities.

Natural athletes have a coordination that you can't learn. You've got to be born with it. And of course it can be improved with the right training and the right exercises but you've got to have the natural ability to start off with.

I asked Charlie, if he looked back, would there be anything he would do differently.
Not much except that I should have learned how to use two hands on my backhand. That would have made a lot of difference, believe me.

Rose and I talked about what it was like for her to learn to swim in college. She took a swimming course as an undergraduate, even though by that time she had built up some fears of the water. She talked about her view of herself as a student.

But it was something that I wanted to learn to do so I don’t have any memories of not liking the class. I always liked to learn. If I can learn something then I intend to get in there and try.

Rose remembered about her school days, and mentioned that “I was a good student”. She discussed how her parents felt about their offspring’s grades.

Well, they [her mother and father] had high expectations for us as far as school work. I remember that my parents did not expect us to come home with low grades on report cards. They assumed that we were capable of making A’s and B’s, so why not come home with that kind of a report card?

It isn’t that we were punished. I don’t remember ever being punished for a bad report card but it would be more like a C or lower would be a little bit sneered at in my household. Well, really, they felt that we could do better, so if we didn’t we weren’t doing our part.

I can remember it being more my dad because he was the leader of the family as it usually was in those days. I don’t know if it was just my perspective as a child but I thought he was the smartest man I ever knew. And so he didn’t expect his kids to do less.
I can’t tell you that I saw all my siblings report cards. I don’t remember about that. But I just think that the teachers that saw our family come through expected each one of us to be a good student.

And the other thing, our parents had that work ethic. Everybody was expected to pitch in and contribute and laziness would be pretty sneered at, too. If it was a question of having to put a little bit of work into your school work, well, that was expected. You just do it.

Rose described what the teachers were like at her small country school.

I went to what would be considered a tiny school by most standards today but I think that like schools everywhere, and certainly today, there were good teachers and there were bad teachers. I can remember some very good teachers. I always thought my English teacher gave us a really good background. I learned Latin from her too, and it seemed that I had a good enough command of the English language that when I went to college I had no trouble in those kinds of things at all. I can remember some teachers that I think did a less than adequate job.

Rose explained what she thought made the difference between a good teacher and a poor teacher.

Well, as far as I’m concerned a good teacher knows his or her stuff and comes to class well prepared. And knows some strategies for delivering that knowledge to the students so that it’s interesting to them. He or she is able and willing to keep enough discipline in the class that everybody has a chance to learn. I can think of some teachers that really didn’t have that last skill down and the class sort of did whatever they wanted.

I can remember cutting class and going mushroom hunting in a woods nearby. I can remember going with a group. We were taking advantage wherever we could and I’m thinking that might be the way youngsters are today, too. If you don’t hold them to a certain structure, certain rules, they’ll do whatever comes to mind. I can remember there was an old antique car that for some reason or other was parked outside that
school. I can remember that if we had free moments here and there - I
don't think they were all recesses - we'd go out and goof around that
car. I'm trying to remember if it was really in running condition. Maybe
we even drove it around a little bit. I don't know. I just remember things
like that and I think discipline wasn't terribly strict. It was kind of loose
there. And yet I feel that we were well enough taught that those of us
that wanted to go on to school didn't have any problems, so we were
fortunate.

I mentioned first of all that they [teachers] needed to have a good
knowledge of their own subject. I think they need to be able to speak
well and clearly so that they're easy to listen to. I think the material must
be on the level where the students are, where they can get some grasp of
it and then start to move on. You can't be talking over their heads. You
can't just lecture all the time and bore them to tears. You've got to give
them some chances for participation. Teachers need to make students
feel that they believe in them, that they're worthwhile individuals. I
think learning needs to be a shared experience.

Rose mentioned what she liked about the "good" teacher she
remembered from her school days.

I guess I found her to be a likable person. I thought that she liked me,
too, and believed that I had some abilities. I liked the fact that she came
across as sort of a caring person. She knew her stuff. And of course
Stuart knows his stuff and has a good personality, too. So I guess liking
the instructor is an important part of that. I think for me learning
anything new, like a sport for instance, takes a little bit of persistence
and practice.

Since I've been a teacher myself maybe I look at it a little bit differently
now. I want to see teachers now that really are willing to go the extra
mile for their students. That are willing to break out of old patterns and
ruts that they've fallen into and try some new things. I like teachers that
don't just care about the subject matter but care about the kids' well-
being and put their needs first, before their own.
When I asked Rose about the instruction she was receiving from Stuart, she stated:

I think he knows exactly where we are. And then, exactly what we need to learn. Stuart’s giving us some real good pointers.

I’ve been very happy with Stuart as a teacher. I never feel, even though he has to correct us, I never feel put down by him but only encouraged.

Probably the drills have helped me the most. It’s hard to separate it out, because he tells you how to do it and then you practice doing it. I don’t know if either one would be real successful without the other. I’d just say the instruction is good. And the practice of course helps round that out. There’s no way to learn much without practicing a little bit.

I asked Rose if she had always liked learning new things.

I have. I hope I always do. Learning something new probably seems like a little bit of a challenge to me. Maybe I like to be challenged. It might be boring if you never were learning anything new, right?

Don’t you think life is a learning experience probably from birth to death?

As long as you have the ability to learn it seems to me that you can add some spark to your life and maybe when you lose some of your physical abilities you can still have that one. You can still do some new things.

I guess I think all learning is keeping you from getting stale, isn’t it? Hopefully it is. It’s good for the brain cells.

I like to do crossword puzzles. It’s partly because I think it probably is good to keep trying to intellectually challenge yourself. Part of it is that I have a desire to solve the puzzle. Part of it is that it’s a game to be won or lost.
We talked about the different styles of teaching. I asked Rose if she thought teachers of adult students should treat their charges any differently than teachers of children. She replied:

Well, teachers of adult students probably don’t want to talk down to them since they may be near the same age level. In this case most of us are quite a few years older than our instructor, so the instructor probably doesn’t want to take the superior, “I’m talking down to you” attitude, and of course he hasn’t. Again, I think that in an adult class the instructor might want to adopt the shared learning method where they’re telling you some things that they know but they give you a chance also to help one another and maybe share some insights that you might have.

I think with children it’s a little different. You’re trying to support the young as they learn some new skills, so I think it’s a little different than the sharing that I was thinking about. However, I think that humor helps with either population that you mentioned, and of course Stuart uses that in his class. Somehow it always seems to smooth things and make things easier. I believe that adults have had many experiences in their lifetimes that can add to the class in one way or another.

You know, today at 63 I don’t think I’m as fast [of a learner]. I don’t think I’m as fast a reader as I was then and there are times that I think I don’t have the same short term memory. So I would say that probably I’d have to work at it a little bit harder now than I did at age 53.

I read something not so long ago that they were saying that there were fallacies about adult learning, but what the researchers have come up with so far is that the long term learning stays as good as it ever was. Problem solving stays as good as it ever was. Short term memory does decrease. They don’t know why but it does. And I believe I see that in myself.
Aging

Betty and I were talking about the issue of aging, and how she remembered her life when her daughter was small. She believed aging has caused her to slow down to some degree.

When she [her daughter] was young, and I was younger, I was more active, you know. I jumped, I did this, I did that, but anymore, I just sort of sit there.

Raised during a time when familiarity with one’s acquaintances was not as common as today, Betty was often surprised by how people interact with one another. She exclaimed,

Everything is so casual today. After you’ve met someone for the second time they want to hug you! Years ago feelings were not as open, a lot of things you didn’t talk about. Whereas today you talk about everything. Sometimes I wish you wouldn’t! Things are so casual, you may get called by your first name immediately.

We talked about this, and I asked her if she felt our tennis class was a little too casual. Interestingly, she took the opposite position by relating formality to issues of aging. Betty thought that being more formal might result in a less enjoyable class as it could cause people to remember their ages, perhaps leading them to feel less playful and young.

If you said “Mr. and Mrs.” people might feel sort of stiff and a little older.
Fred believed that aging and a lack of playing have made a serious difference in his level of performance. He described how he tried to stay involved in softball by playing on a team in the senior’s league.

Then I started playing with the seniors and there were too many senior teams so you didn’t get to play much.

I remember when I started playing softball here in [city] five or six years after I had quit in my home town. It was difficult. It was the timing, and the hand and eye coordination. So it proved the point. But whatever you do, whether it’s golf or tennis or walking, you just have to do it.

I asked Fred why he was able to keep motivated and involved in physical activity, yet others in the same age category often did not.

I’ve often thought of that because people ask me, when they ask me how old I am they are sort of surprised that I can still walk, I guess.

Fred played tennis at another club, as well. He had joined a seniors’ league there, but felt unsatisfied. His competitive side was not being fulfilled. I asked Fred to explain how he felt about playing tennis with these seniors.

There’s a little problem there. They seem to have layers of talent. I’ve been playing with the 80 year olds. There’s a couple of them up there that are decent but, see, they can’t move and what they do is hit the ball to each other. That’s not tennis. They’ve got in a bad habit of doing it. But, you know the guy can’t move two steps and if you try and place it past him, I just feel awkward at it so I hit it back to him and that’s the way they play.

Charlie talked about what the issue of aging meant to him. In terms of tennis, he said:
My backhand is very weak. I should have learned how to use two hands but at my age I’m not sure I should try to change.

Charlie and I talked about how he spent his time after he retired from his career as an engineer.

For a while after I retired I did consulting work, which I found quite interesting. But since my wife’s death I’ve kind of lost interest in that.

I asked Charlie why he wanted to participate in the tennis course. He replied:

[For] the exercise and the idea that I can still do it. There will come a time when I won’t be able to do it. Believe me I’m not near as nimble as I used to be. I have trouble seeing the ball, which is a problem I didn’t used to have. When the ball gets close I have trouble zeroing in on it. We all must recognize that as we get older we slow down. There are a lot of things we can’t do. But I guess my philosophy is I’m going to resist slowing down as long as I can.

Up until lately I could play a pretty good game [tennis]. I could hit it and know where it would land. My aneurysm operation didn’t help any. My physical strength and endurance have gone way down. Can’t see as well as I used to, and am generally deteriorating.

I asked Charlie if physical activity helped him, and whether he thought he would slow down quicker without it.

It helps, believe me. You certainly would [slow down quicker]. All you have to do is visit these retirement centers and rest homes and see these people who are vegetating. They go to pieces pretty fast.

Stay active as long as you can. Stay out of the rest homes. They’re warehouses for old people is all they are.
You go to a rest home and you see these people and it makes you cry. I’m going to fight it as long as I can, I can tell you that.

Society doesn’t know what to do with them.

Once you stop doing things you’ll vegetate and you’ll go downhill pretty fast.

I hope to stay active and helpful to my fellow man as long as I can.

Your lifestyle has a lot to do with how long you live, and how well you live. Smoking, extra drinking, and drugs will tear you down pretty fast.

Thelma had some interesting things to say about aging and physical activity.

You know, it [the lessons] will give me a chance to continue with it [tennis]. I wasn’t sure that I could do it, you know how you don’t have the strength and the breath when you get older as you did when you were younger. And when I ran after some of the balls this last Monday I thought, “I don’t believe I’m doing this!”

I asked Thelma what made her want to take the tennis lessons. She explained:

Just the fact that I’m getting back into learning the game. Practice. I remember the week before last I did a lot of serving. Mark told us how to serve. I remember I tried, but it was very hard, and boy, my arms were really sore and tired. I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to use my arm again this coming Monday, but it worked out. It worked out fine.

It’s kind of funny to start at this age, to do all these things. I thought if you got old, you don’t do these things, but I’m doing ‘em anyway!

Do you know, now I don’t want you to tell anybody, but I think a lot of these older people around here they walk too slow, and they act too old.
And I feel really young! And I think, why do they do that? But you know that Charlie, he’s 84, isn’t that marvelous? So, I just feel so young I just go ahead and do these things.

I don’t know. I’ve never felt old. I’ve always been really active doing something. Actually, I never thought about being old.

I just wanted to do them [physical activities] because I had done them before, it seems like I could do it again. Once I got two or three sessions of whatever. Actually, nothing was hard. It’s just a matter of getting started again. But everything I’ve done, except the weight-lifting, and the volleyball. I’ve done a little bit of all of them.

Well, my brother says “you’re going to be living to such and such a year. Well, I’ve had a couple of uncles, a couple of aunts and various relatives who have lived, grandmothers and grandfathers who have lived quite a long time, so I don’t dwell on it an awful lot. But like today it was announced that Lana Turner, a movie star from way back, had died. But she lived to 75. I guess that was okay. But a lot of people do live longer. I’m sure that it has to do with the genes but it may also have to do with the way you’re doing things.

Yeah. Now look at Charlie. He looks good, doesn’t he? I don’t know what his age is but he’s so slim and trim. He must do a lot of things. I heard he’s 84. Gee, he’s great. He looks as good as some, or better than some 50 year olds!

Thelma and I talked about teaching. I asked her if she had ever had a teacher at the senior center who made certain allowances for the age of the students.

Well, they all have said if this is too much for you, if you get tired don’t do it, or slow down or rest or go get a drink of water or something. That’s the only indication I’ve heard of us being treated as old as we are, but yesterday in aerobics Laurie did different things and she kept us going, which is good.
Thelma explained some of what made her want to stay involved in physical activity at her stage in life.

All the activity that I’ve ever had, you have to keep thinking and remembering, and I think it does help your mind to be more active and it’s a good memory test with all the various activities.

I asked Rose if she was familiar with the concept of older adults pursuing sports and physical activities.

I see a little bit about sports in some of the magazines that come to our house now. One time I read an article that said the fastest growing age group in downhill skiing are the seniors. And that just blew my mind! They’ve got the time and some of them have found that they love it. You know, what I like about skiing is not only being outside but the beautiful scenery that you’re in. The beautiful scenery and I think that other seniors getting started on that probably get hooked and just love it. They’ve got the time. Most of them have the money to travel a little bit. As long as they’re in good health, if they don’t mind a little risk-taking, well, why not do it?

I’ve thought that probably young people looking at me think “what is she doing up here? Why isn’t she home watching TV or something?” I have had some of those feelings from time to time. Not often. I can’t say often but yet it is kind of there. I can’t remember what foolish thing I was doing that brought it to mind. But with more people falling into this age bracket now, I think the push is really on to knock out those limits, those stereotypes that have been kind of confining and realize that this is a population that by and large can still think. Maybe have something to contribute. And they might still be interested in physical activity.

They need to try it once or twice before they buy into that.
We tend to fit into those old aged stereotypes. We fit ourselves into them instead of having the courage to just keep on doing all that we can do.

Sometimes I think it’s an intrinsic thing like whether on the inside you feel young or not. If you feel young, I think you tend to act young. Maybe you keep that young feeling by never stopping trying to learn new things.

You know I’ve gotten more interested in gardening in the last two or three years.

That old stereotype, nothing stays the same except change, or something like that [is true]. But life changes and sometimes you have more time for some activities that you didn’t used to have time for, and you can pick up new interests. And so why get stale? If you can’t run around and play tennis like you used to when you were younger there’s probably some other things you can still do. Maybe you can learn something brand new.

**Personal Meaning**

I asked Betty why she wanted to participate in physical activity, specifically the tennis. We talked about what she found personally meaningful.

Betty said:

I just thought the tennis sounded good to me. I thought I would like to do that. Well, when I was younger, I was more active, you know. I did this, I did that, but anymore, I just sort of sit there. Plus with working, you just sort of sit there all day, and then you go home and particularly in the winter, when its dark and cold, you don’t want to go back out, so you tend to just sit. And that’s not good to get into that.

I think I was too serious growing up and too serious in raising my daughter. If I had anything to change at all, I would have laughed more.
I think I took parenting seriously. And, I think I should have laughed a little more and not have been uptight about a lot of things. Hold fast to the basics. Just laugh a little more. And I think that’s what I’m doing now. Maybe that’s why the tennis is more relaxing to me. The earth isn’t going to stop revolving if I miss the tennis ball. So it’s fun. And maybe its because there isn’t the responsibility. I guess I have different responsibilities now.

It’s the challenge that you’re going to be able to do it. There’s going to be a time when I’m going to say, “Gayle, let’s play tennis!” We’ll go out, and I’ll be able to do a pretty good job at it. And to enjoy it. And maybe I can get my husband to do it.

I guess my attitude has been this past six months, whatever I do is better than nothing. Like walking. Somebody says, “well, I only walked a mile”, or, “well, I’ve walked three miles”. Whatever you do is better than nothing. You’ve made the effort, you’ve gotten up, you’ve gone, you’ve walked. That’s good. I guess when my daughter was in school, I expected one hundred percent. And maybe I got eighty. But what if I would have expected eighty percent, would I have gotten sixty? So you always try, you may not always totally succeed, you’re not going to be perfect. But whatever you do is better than nothing. So if I go out and walk and I only get a mile in, and maybe the next time I walk two miles, well, terrific! I’m up!

When I asked Fred what made physical activity meaningful to him while growing up, he mentioned that “I wanted to play sports because I liked it, plus I wanted to get out of work!”

I asked him what he liked about participating now. Fred replied:

Earlier the competition. I think it still is, too. It’s inborn in people. Some have it. They have to win. Proves a point. I read a book on tennis, the mind [aspect] of tennis. And this guy said that people have different reasons to come. Some want to show off how good they are; some want to have fun; some want to interact with other people and
some want to keep in shape. It just depends upon what you want out of the game, whatever the exercise might be. But in earlier stages it's all that peer stuff. I think it helps you get into it a lot of times, and maybe keep going if that's what you need, but then later in life after your really active days there's some other things. For me at least its just to stay in shape. Everybody says use it or lose it. And that's true.

I don't have to win. Sometimes I do. I've got to get that shot past that guy on the net or I'm going to hate myself. But then you've got to adjust yourself and say "that's not me". But after you've been competitive for 40 years you can't just drop it.

Now, I always say what I could have done better to win. But in the earlier days I got so mad at myself and I guess everybody goes through that. It's part of the experience, I think, but you don't let it affect you.

People get together for a common cause from different walks of life and they go as a team and they have one purpose, or one goal or several goals. You all contribute whatever little bit you can to the total.

Have fun. That's the biggest thing.

Fred discussed the issue of sport and competition, and reflected on a time when his son, who participated in youth sports, asked him for advice.

I says "have fun". He says "what am I doing wrong?" I said this and that, this and that. I said "but have fun. That's the biggest thing. We're out to have fun. We're not going to win all the games. We're not going to lose them all. Just have fun". So he went into high school and got a scholarship.

A player most of his life, Fred talked about what caused him to leave the seniors' softball league.

Last year and the year before we had such rainy conditions. We were down at the gym. Played basketball half the time and threw the softball
the rest of the time. We had a couple of practices outside and then all of a sudden they say, everybody came back from last year, so we’ve got too many. And then they sent me to [another team] and I practiced with them a couple of weeks, and then they had too many guys. So they didn’t say anything but I felt - I wanted to play a little bit more than they put me in. I just figured I was taking up too much room so I left. Then I decided to get into tennis.

Now that it’s summer I’ll be scouting around to find a group of guys that I can fit in with and play a little bit more competitive.

Fred reflected on what he thought was the best thing about learning something new.

Accomplishment. You try something new and you say gee whiz, this is just like doing this over here. Where it’s entirely different. Tennis is different. It’s a little bit like hitting a baseball. It’s all timing, and after you get the strokes down, then you’ve got to get stronger and then you’ve got to learn the court.

You don’t want to get in a down draft. That’s what they call it. Luck is against you and your mind isn’t working right. They’re not functioning. They’ve got to be together as one.

I looked around for something that I could do myself and only myself. I wasn’t dependent upon too many other things in the way I could live. So I’ve been working at the commodities.

Everybody has to strive for something. To have an accomplishment, a feeling of doing something, and not have it given to them.

I asked Fred if he ever felt bored.

No. I feel like I’m not doing enough. I was seriously considering helping kids read. But the only thing right now is I don’t want to commit to anything. That’s the only thing I have against it right now. I do what I want when I want to do it. For so many years you had to get up and
you had to do this and you had to do that. I didn’t mind getting up, but it was the regimentation. That’s why I didn’t stay in the service.

When I asked Charlie what made physical activity most meaningful to him, he said, “I feel I need the exercise; I enjoy the game”. I asked him what he hoped to get out of the tennis class.

Well, mostly the exercise. I guess that’s about it. I still like to bat the ball.

We talked about whether just volleying the ball back and forth was enough for him, or if he would you rather play more competitive games. Charlie explained:

I think I’d rather play the game. Batting the ball is all right but I think I’d rather play doubles. I can’t move around the courts like I used to. I’d rather play. It’s more interesting. Keep track of the score. My serve used to be one of my best strokes but I’ve somehow lost it. I can’t hit the ball in. I used to get about 80% of my first serves in. Now I get about 20% of them in. I don’t have much power on them, either.

Charlie had some advice for young people.

My advice would be learn a sport that they can carry into their senior citizen years. Football, baseball have some limits. Hockey is the same way. Basketball is much the same way. Go in for tennis, golf, swimming. Sports that you can continue through your senior years. Football damages a lot of people. A couple of men that worked for me at the university ended up almost cripples because their knees were so badly damaged when they were young. That’s before they learned how to repair joints. But football is a rough sport.

I try to keep active and doing many things. I like the exercise and I like to play tennis.
Thelma found movement and physical activities to be very meaningful to her. She had much to say about staying actively and physically involved with life.

I guess I like to be active. I think sports are a lot of fun. I just enjoy it so much. All this activity makes me feel a lot better.

Well, I started my aerobics a few years before I came here, not too many, maybe two or three. Now, when I do the weight lifting and everything, it just seems like my body is cleared out. I mean I’m not muddy on the inside. Do you know what I’m trying to say? It wakes you up. You’re a little bit more peppy than you would be otherwise. And it makes you feel good. I can’t visualize anybody not walking, which I do a lot of, and exercising. I just can’t see why people can’t do that, why they don’t want to do that. It just makes you more, you’re activity is easier on you. I’m not using the right words, but anyway...

Thelma and I talked about our tennis class. She told me she wants her skills to improve. I asked her if she wanted to be considered a “good” tennis player.

Oh I think so. Yeah! I do. I want to be able to play tennis and be able to hit the ball. Sometimes I run and I don’t quite make it.

I asked Thelma how proficient she wanted to be.

Oh, just good enough to have fun. I’m not going to excel to the point where I’ll play with a league that you really have to, you know, win. No, that’s too late. In the early years I would have wanted to.

Maybe I should stop something and excel at one thing. But that wouldn’t be a lot of fun, would it? I mean its more fun to do a little bit of everything.
I’ve done a little bit of activity throughout all the years. I haven’t really just sat. I’ve done swimming, I’ve done the ice skating with the boys. Not too many years, just enough to keep going. And this and that. I’m surprised I’m still doing this. I really am. I just expected I couldn’t do it. Well, once I got started its just like de ja vo.

It just helps a person’s well-being. You just feel like - I don’t really feel all that bouncy or anything, but on these various trips, these one day trips, I don’t want to say it in front of anybody but you, but some of these people walk so slow and I want to go and I want to see something and they just stand and talk. It’s just like they’re the only person in the room. They forget there are other people around and I want to move! Move, move, I want to go! So. I just don’t feel like I’m old and I think exercise helps you feel that way.

I seem to be a person that if somebody is doing something that looks interesting I want to do that, too.

But I think it’s fun. Tennis is fun. I’ve always liked it. I love ice skating. I don’t mind walking 2, 3 miles, which I don’t do too much of the time, but I like line dancing. That’s an easy form of exercise but I think it’s fun. And I just can’t imagine anybody just sitting. Some people like to read. That’s fine. I like to read, too. But you’ve got to be active, especially if you want to live a long time.

I think it [exercise] helps with everything. I think whatever I do I’m able to do it at maybe a faster pace and maybe a longer length of time. When I finish exercising and everything I don’t go home and flop. I don’t feel like that.

At least I have enough energy to keep going. Yesterday I spent 4, 5 hours typing. I didn’t get tired. I took a break and had something to eat and watched a little bit of news and then I went back to it. I’ll bet if I didn’t do all the activities that I did I might not be able to handle all of that consistent typing and everything.
Again, you just feel more active, more wide awake. You don’t feel like it’s a loss of time doing it, you know, because whatever else you need to do it’s easier to do it afterwards. Yes, I think it’s a big help, exercising.

Oh, well, exercise might be life-centered, but I also take a French class and I’m in an investment class. It just broadens your view. I think doing all these things help you keep your mind alert, and I’m not the brightest person in the world, but at least you know something other than your own little world of whatever it is that you do. I really do a lot of things when you come to think of it, but I don’t do anything at any great length of time. For example I go to concerts and plays every now and then. And I go to the zoo every once in awhile. I don’t go every week, that sort of thing. I walk but I don’t walk every day, but that’s because I have a trampoline at home so I use that for ten minutes, fifteen minutes.

Well, any sports, tennis or otherwise keeps your body really limber and active and in turn, if you do that your mind and your thinking is active and then you’re not sluggish or anything like that. I think being active is a good thing for an older person. If you’re not active you just lose it. You need to do things. You can’t just stay at home and die. If you’ve been active all your life you’ve got to keep that going. You don’t have to, you want to. You just feel like you can’t be sitting all the time. Although it’s easy to sit if you don’t feel well and that sort of thing but if you feel well...I mean you just want to keep more and more active. Whatever it is you want to do.

I think it [exercise] helps. Everybody has got problems in their lives. There’s always something big and bad that has happened and I think the exercise, various exercise programs get your mind off of that bad feeling, that sort of thing. And I think it’s important to do that.

You like it and it’s fun.

When I asked Rose what she liked best about the class she responded by saying:
Let's see. What do I like best? Since I've always wished to be a better tennis player I like having the instruction the best. I like to have some pointers that will help me improve my game and I like to have the practice, which I know is a necessity. I guess those would be the most important things to me.

Rose and I talked about her participation in sport and physical activity. I asked her if she considered herself a competitive person. Rose replied:

I have been termed competitive by some different people in my life. I think they're probably right. I don't think I am so much in physical things like tennis where I'm just learning. I don't feel that in myself so much but in things that I've done for a while. If I'm going to play a game of bridge or lots of things - Scrabble I'll play to win if I can. Don't you think that's sort of an inborn trait that you try to do your best? In other words you're going to try to do your best no matter where you are.

It just seems to me that whatever I've tried to do I've tried to do it well. I guess there's just something inside of me that motivates me. Give it a pretty good shot. No half way measures. I wonder if I learned it from my family growing up.

Rose and I talked about what it felt like to strive to be the best. She said:

There may be some drawbacks. It may add stress to a life. It may add a certain amount of frustration. You could get into quite a thing with that. Emotional problems. I think striving probably always is a little harder life. But probably more satisfying.

Rose and I discussed what mattered most to her concerning exercise and physical activity. I asked her to tell me what she thought was the most meaningful aspect of participating in the tennis lessons? What motivated her to make the effort? She stated:
Learning and the fact that I really wish that I was a good enough tennis player to play tennis the rest of my life. I’d like to be a good enough player that I could invite somebody to play, and be able to hold my own. So I suppose that’s the goal for me in doing this. I think that would be nice to be able to do, and hopefully as long as you’re feeling well and so forth you just keep on doing that.

I asked Rose how good at tennis did she want to be.

Well, I’d like to be as good as I could be. You know me. I’d at least like to be good enough to go out and just play for enjoyment and exercise. An outdoor activity. Something fun to do in nice weather. You don’t want to sit in the house and watch TV do you?

In my role as a guidance counselor sometimes I try to help kids identify things that they can do to make themselves feel better. I always tell them that one thing I tend to do is get outside. Even if it’s just to go for a walk. But do something you like to do outside. The other half of it is to do something physical. Maybe you get your mind off your troubles a little bit more, especially if you’re doing it with other people. You can kind of forget about it, can’t you? For a little while and then pretty soon you may have a little more balanced perspective about what happened.

Rose told me how she would go about teaching the tennis class.

I tend to be a rather helpful person which is probably why I became a counselor, so I’d probably be standing on my head to try to help people improve their skills. I don’t know exactly how I would go about it since I’m not much of a tennis player yet. But, you know how I am, if I were going to do it I’d be giving it my best shot.

We talked about how physical activity has affected her life. Rose explained:

Well, I think it has affected my life a lot. Look at water skiing. A simple little thing that I learned right out of college, and for the major part of my life in the summer we would water ski. All the summers we spent water
skiing at [lake] with Evelyn and Ralph and all the cousins and all the good times that we had. You wouldn’t really give those good times up for anything, would you?

Looking back they were treasures. Better than money in the bank. A whole bunch better. And even the [snow] skiing, once we did that. Lots of fun there and at least I got to go to Colorado. Also true for the swimming. All the beach vacations we took. If I hadn’t been able to swim I’m not sure we would have gone to all those beaches up and down the eastern seashore. From Atlantic City right on down the coast. We kept going further south and further south until it was Myrtle Beach and Florida.

Most of our vacations were around the water. It [physical activity] has added lots to our lives. If you think about subtracting all those things what would we have done in their place that would have been that much fun? I can’t even think of anything.

I asked Rose if she thought learning tennis was important or relevant.

She replied:

Well, if it’s something that I could do for fun for the next 20 years that would be important to me. I don’t know if it will turn out that way, but we’ll give it a chance.

Rose and I discussed the differences between teachers of adults and teachers of children. I asked her if she felt she was being treated as a capable adult in our tennis classes.

I think I’m being dealt with as a person that can learn if I really keep trying and spend the time on improving my game. I think the assumption is that I can learn to play tennis. I’m not trying to be a pro. All I’m trying to do is just be able to play enough to have some fun. Maybe have some social activities that way.
Rose related her thoughts on adult learning. I asked her if she believed adults learned new things if they felt that somehow their life situations would be improved. She said:

I think that's a powerful incentive to learn something. If you want to improve your life situation you really have bought into it, haven't you?

Well, if it's a hobby that's meaningful, it does improve their lives.

Rose related how she has become interested in computers and e-mail, and in the information superhighway. I asked her if she felt she was a person who was driven by her curiosity. She replied:

I think I would agree and you know something else? I'm glad. Otherwise you get left way in the dust, I guess, wouldn't you?

Never was my ideal to be in the back of a pack. I've already told you that. No, I'll always be curious I think.

Summary

The meanings of learning and engaging in physical activity, expressed in the participants' own words and presented in the narrative form, are inscribed in this document. These along with the fieldnotes created from personal observations formulate the basis of this chapter.

Six recurring themes are identified throughout the study. These are past sport participation, health, relationships, learning, aging, and personal meaning.
It would appear that each of these categories is important to how participating in physical activity, learning, and aging are perceived among this group of older adults.

The following chapter will summarize the research process and the findings of this investigation. Finally, suggestions will be made for future research.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

We shall never cease from exploration.
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate participation, learning and the personal meaning of five older adults within the context of sport and physical activity. Analysis and description focused on three fundamental areas: (a) an investigation of the issues which influence the meaning and relevance participating in physical activity may have for an older population, (b) factors which positively contribute to the learning process, and (c) an examination of andragogical assumptions regarding adult learning. The final chapter is divided into three sections: These sections include: (a) summary of the research process, (b) summary of the data findings, and (c) recommendations for further research.
Summary of the Research Process

The examination of learning and meaning that older adults attach to physical activity resulted from my professional interests regarding societal attitudes toward aging, and lifetime participation in exercise and sport. My past involvement with older adults in an educative and sport-related context included teaching seniors such varied skills as downhill snow-skiing, swimming, canoeing, and miniature race car driving. The reading, research, insights, and information I received from graduate courses in socio-cultural aspects of sport, adult education, and andragogical teaching methodology increased my interest in this topic and particular segment of the population.

In an effort to understand issues of learning and meaning for older adults relating to their participation in physical activity, case studies within the interpretive and descriptive paradigm were selected as a part of the research design. The following questions guided the study:

1. What do older adults find meaningful about participating in physical activity?
2. What factors positively contribute to the learning process?
3. Are the assumptions of andragogy pertinent to the learning of physical activity among an older adult population?
This investigation, within the qualitative research paradigm, emphasized understanding ways in which older adults learn and make meaning of physical activity. Because remaining active throughout the lifespan has been linked to such positive factors as longevity, physiological health and psychological well-being (Berger, 1989; Brown, Cundiff & Thompson, 1989; McPherson, 1986), the concern with what enhances meaning within the experience of participating in and learning about physical activities among an older adult population was a pertinent one.

Since the research was exploratory and descriptive in nature, a multiple case study approach was chosen. These case studies involved three women and two men selected through purposeful sampling. The participants of this research study were members of a senior center in a large midwestern city. A collaboration between this senior center and a tennis club resulted in an opportunity for all senior center members to obtain free tennis lessons. The lessons were advertised to the membership through the monthly bulletin. Those who were curious were encouraged to try the activity by the center's director and staff. Interested seniors then self-selected the tennis course and signed up for the lessons. The lessons were taught at an indoor tennis facility during the cold weather months, then moved outdoors to a city park for the
summer season. These lessons were taught primarily by an independent professional who made his living through tennis instruction. All the individuals who signed up and followed through with the lessons voluntarily agreed to take part in this 15-week research investigation.

In order for the participants to describe their experiences and meanings with learning and participating in physical activity, I interviewed them twice using semi-structured interview guides as the format for their questioning (Appendix C; Appendix D). This guided interview approach was developed from previous research studies with adults and older adults participating in recreational and physical activities (Rosenberg, Nelson, & Workman, 1993; Workman, Pastore, Nelson, & Rosenberg, 1994). This approach provided consistency in the topics while allowing for much individuality and flexibility in responses to emerge (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983). To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data, I asked and received permission for each interview to be audio taped. In addition, each transcribed interview was given back to the participants for member checking and review. Further, throughout the research study I kept a detailed journal of field notes recording my observations, thoughts and impressions of the learners and their participation in the activity of learning tennis. The verbatim transcripts along with my field notes and
journal became the data for the analysis. This information was analyzed both within and across cases.

Each transcribed interview was coded and categorized in order to discover and develop emergent themes and patterns. The findings of this investigation were displayed in a narrative form, using the actual words and phrases of the participants to demonstrate and explain the conclusions.

**Summary of the Research Findings**

The analyzed data relates specifically to the five participants who took part in this research investigation. It was never my intent to generalize these findings to all older adults, but to instead seek response patterns that may increase understandings of meanings transferable to individuals in similar situations. It is understood that these findings were influenced by the thoughts and feelings of the participants at the particular time and place in which they were recorded. The strength of the study was enhanced by the opportunity each participant had to review their own transcribed words at a later date.

The data will be summarized in relation to the research questions, literature, and findings of this investigation.
Question 1:

What do older adults find meaningful about learning and participating in physical activity?

After the data were analyzed for similar patterns and themes, it was found that comments made by the participants in this study could be compiled into six broad categories. While the frequency and nature of their individual comments varied among the participants, discernible patterns did emerge. The distinctions that were made within the context of meaning through participation in physical activity were very individualized. In summarizing the data, the six patterns of response were grouped into these frameworks: (a) health, (b) relationships, (c) past sport participation, (d) aging, (e) personal meaning, and (f) learning.

A. Health

The theme that came up most frequently was the topic of health. For all of the participants, it appeared as though this aspect of their engagement in physical activity motivated them the most. Betty, one of the participants in the study, depicted her recent involvement in tennis as a preventative strategy for lowering her level of cholesterol. Her doctor had told her she would need to
take medications to control the problem. Being loathe to start prescription
drugs, Betty sought alternative avenues to improve her level of health. As a
part of her new proactive stance, she began a walking program and watched her
cooking, baking, grocery shopping and eating habits more closely. Thinking
she still wasn’t getting enough exercise through her walking regime, Betty
sought a more vigorous activity. That is when she became aware of the tennis
program at the senior center. Betty mentioned that she also has some arthritis.
She believed that to keep this condition from worsening she must remain
physically active.

Although Charlie pessimistically concluded that eventually “we all fall
apart”, he thought he could slow this process through physical activity. What
seemed to motivate him most was his fear of ending up in a nursing home.
Though he took a rather fatalistic attitude toward the process of aging, he
strongly believed that staying active could delay physiological decline. He
cautioned about the necessity of remaining physically active in order to stay
away from retirement centers as long as possible.

Thelma exercised, it appeared, because she simply loved to move. But
another compelling motive was that she was afraid of becoming like her sister,
who was overweight, weak, and sick. Her concern with her own weight and
strength have prompted her to continue to engage in physical activities. Thelma also discussed issues relating to longevity. She told me she is not “ready to go”, and hoped to live into her 90s. Quite concerned about her health, Thelma told me she frequently read magazine articles pertaining to nutrition and exercise. Thinking about her sister’s sickness and helplessness, Thelma confided, was what kept her motivated to participate in a wide range of physical activities.

Because of the polio he endured and the ill health he experienced as a child, Fred became aware very early in life of the importance of keeping his body strong. He reminded me that “health regulates your life and what you can do to a large degree”. The tennis classes, he told me, were to help him “keep in shape”. Fred has always felt a strong responsibility to maintain his health through careful weight management, good nutrition, and adequate levels of exercise.

Rose discussed a chronic back injury she incurred some years ago, and talked about how physical activity affects this ongoing problem. She stated that the worst thing she can do is to become sedentary. Her experience with this physical impairment confirmed her view that to maintain optimal health, she
must move and stretch regularly. Rose believed that as people grow older they should continue to exercise and utilize their bodies in physically active ways.

These findings are consistent with literature which suggested a positive correlation between exercise, physiological functioning, and psychological health throughout the adult lifespan (Berger, 1989; Brown et al., 1989; McPherson, 1986). Long associated with optimum health and longevity, Schaie and Geiwitz (1982) found that exercise can play an important role in the lives of older people. Research studies have shown that physical activity can enhance various aspects of health such as muscular endurance, muscular strength, cardiovascular efficiency, decrease blood pressure, and slow the onset of osteoporosis (Schaie & Geiwitz, 1982; Brown et al., 1989). It appeared that the five participants in the current study subscribed to these previous findings. It was evident that they viewed participating in physical activity as critical for either maintaining or improving their current level of health.

B. Relationships

Betty and Rose mentioned that their daughters had encouraged their participation in the tennis course. Rose’s daughter, who lived near the tennis site, thought her mother’s participation would provide the two of them with
additional opportunities to spend time together. Rose acknowledged that this was a strong motivator for her to engage in the tennis lessons.

Rose mentioned that she liked and felt accepted by the members of the group right away, even though she was the last person to join the activity. She inferred that the positive feeling she received from the others had enhanced her experience. In discussing whether sport participation had any bearing on her relationships with other people, Rose confirmed that it had, speaking of vacations and leisure pursuits she had shared with family and friends throughout her life. Rose clearly felt that enjoying physical activities with her loved ones had directly affected her overall happiness and satisfaction with her life.

Betty’s daughter was instrumental in getting her mother involved in the tennis lessons by pointing out that her mother was not getting enough physical activity. This noticing prompted Betty to evaluate her level of exercise and soon after initiated her enrollment in the tennis classes. While involvement with others was not her primary motivation for signing up for the tennis course, Betty enjoyed the camaraderie and companionship she felt from the other members. She spoke of the void she had felt due to her retirement from a job she had liked. After her retirement she experienced a lack of social interaction
with peers. It was interesting that the positive interactive aspects of taking part in the tennis course seemed to catch Betty by surprise. It seemed that the lessons came to mean more than she initially realized they would.

Thelma also seemed highly motivated to engage in active interactions with other people. The reason she got involved in the tennis course in the first place was because a woman she was familiar with had encouraged her to join. Thelma was the only woman in the group who lived alone. In part because there was no one at home for her to do things with, Thelma spoke of her tendency to reach out to others by taking part in the senior center and its’ exercise programs. She spoke often about how important she thought it was to join classes in order to find people with similar interests. She has found a way to make friends and connect with people through her participation in physical activity.

All three women in the group classified themselves as “people persons” who truly like and enjoy being with others. Each of them declared that while they do not mind doing some activities alone, they prefer exercises and recreations which include the presence of other people.

An interesting aspect of this study was that the men in the group, Fred and Charlie, were somewhat reluctant to discuss their feelings about others in
their lives. This was particularly evident in relation to their participation in physical activities. Though Charlie spent little time speaking about his social needs, I suspected that the primary reason he continued to engage in the tennis class was because he enjoyed being a part of the group. Already a rather advanced player, Charlie could not be convinced that he would improve or learn anything new in our tennis class. Since he felt this way, I found it interesting that he never missed a lesson.

Charlie had been living by himself since his wife died several years ago, and admitted that he sometimes got lonely. However, he sincerely believed he had choices about his destiny. In addition to his participation in tennis he was also a member of a bowling team. He revealed his interest in associating with others by explaining that “you get to know people through sports faster than through any other activity”.

Fred, who has lived alone since his divorce 15 years ago, seemed very independent and not needing of much social interaction. Easily our best player, Fred was more to himself than anyone else in the group. At times Fred seemed a little gruff and short with the others. He did not join in any after class activities with the rest of the members. Although he mentioned his past involvement with other people through sports, it seemed to be more difficult for
him to make the same connections now. He mentioned how problematic it was
to find people he could do things with at this stage of life. While still quite
competitive, he has found he must balance his love of competition against his
need for group acceptance. Since our group could not possibly meet his
competitive needs, I surmised from our conversations and my observations that
Fred was a participant in the class primarily because he yearned for group
membership and a sense of belonging.

The literature indicated that satisfaction in sport and physical activity is
partially derived from obtaining approval from significant others (McPherson, et
al., 1989). Also, McPherson (1990) found that "successful aging" was related to
life satisfaction and the development of leisure activity patterns with others. In
addition, Cousins and Burgess (1992) found that adults have a wider
perspective from which to view athletic achievement. They also have an
orientation which extends to additional aspects of the sport experience, such as
meeting people and sharing the moment. These researchers state that
becoming involved in physical activities may benefit older adults by increasing
their opportunities for socialization (Cousins & Burgess, 1992). The findings
from this study concurred with previous conclusions, indicating that one of the
motivators for these respondents to become involved in this tennis course was to engage in interactions with others.

C. Past Sport Participation

For all the participants in this study, the meaning of physical activity was developed and possibly enhanced by an early involvement with sport. It was interesting that although the Great Depression deeply affected their lives and constrained their leisure, each individual found ways to engage in active recreational pursuits as children and young adults. Another interesting finding was that though the focus in their families was primarily upon a strong work ethic, the children were allowed time to engage in some sporting activities with one another. Finally, each participant could remember their siblings and fathers engaging in active leisure pursuits, but no one could recollect their mothers taking part in any recreational physical activities. The mothers, it was recalled, were too busy working for their families to take the time to play.

Thelma appeared to have had the most opportunity to pursue physical activities as a child. She raced, swam, and played basketball, among other sporting pursuits. Betty was also active growing up, and recollected playing vigorous street games with her siblings. Rose remembered that she and her
sisters and brother played running games at home like “kick the can”, but also recalled how her school had little in the way of organized sporting activities for girls. Since her country school did not have a Physical Education program, Rose did not have the opportunity to learn sport activities until her college years. Although he spent the majority of his time working to pay his way through school, Charlie spoke about how he enjoyed playing tennis with his brothers on a makeshift court in his grandmother’s lot. Fred remembered that while he enjoyed sports, his motivation for engaging in physical activities was intensely related to acquiring the polio disease as a young boy. As soon as it was possible he participated in all manner of sports in order to build up his wasted legs and regain his health.

A review of the literature indicated a paucity of studies which examined the relationship between past sport participation and current sport participation in older adults. The findings from the current study seem to indicate that past sport participation may have encouraged these respondents to continue to engage in physical activity. It is interesting to note that despite financial hardships, illness, or lack of parental involvement, the five respondents in this study remember childhood’s spent pursuing a variety of physical activities. As all of these people are still interested in learning and participating in physical
activity and sport, future investigations might want to analyze this possible linkage further.

D. Aging

When asked to describe how they felt about aging and their participation in physical activity, most participants felt that on some fundamental level the circumstance of aging had negatively impacted their athletic performance. Fred indicated that it was the combination of aging and lack of playing time that together contributed to limit his sport prowess. He explained that his timing and hand-eye coordination had suffered by not engaging in sport as often as he had when he was a younger man. However, Fred still enjoys participation in physical activity, and is dryly amused by people who seem amazed that he is still able to play at his “advanced” age. The problem, according to Fred, is that he is not able to participate in tennis as competitively as he would like because he cannot find other seniors willing or able to participate on the same high level. Fred complains that too many older people have gotten into the “bad habit” of hitting the ball back and forth to each other, rather than trying to place the ball past the opponent and win the point.
Charlie felt that at age 84 his ability as a sport participant was significantly impacted by a recent operation and a consequent decline in his physical strength and endurance. He adamantly argued that he is no longer interested in competition, though to watch him would cast serious doubt on this position. For Charlie, though he may no longer care whether he is as competitive as he once was, the important thing is that he is still actively engaged in playing the game. Charlie truly subscribes to the “use it or lose it” philosophy. He believes that the onset of old age necessarily slows one down, but that natural declines can be attenuated by exercising and maintaining a certain degree of physical fitness.

Thelma was a contradiction in that she told me she was not sure at first whether she would be able to successfully participate in tennis lessons at her age. She remarked that she was afraid she lacked the necessary strength and endurance it took to engage in tennis, and feared physical injury. She laughed at the fact that she still wanted to play tennis at this stage in her life. At the same time, Thelma considered herself young, at least on the inside. Her impression of many older people is that they walk too slow and act too old. She did not think of herself as old, did not think about someday becoming old, and did not let aging issues get in the way of what she wanted to do. For Thelma,
the hardest part of participating in a physical activity is, as she told me, just
going herself started.

Rose believed people often made the mistake of appropriating
stereotypical roles of what they thought it meant to be an older adult. She
perceptively remarked that "we fit ourselves into them [social norms] instead of
having the courage to just keep on doing all that we can do". Rose felt that if
people would continue to try to learn new things, including physical activities,
there would be a much greater propensity for them to feel and act young.

According to the literature, as adults age they often decrease their
involvement in exercise and physical activity (Biddle & Smith, 1991). Yet, while
this decline is often attributed to physiological factors associated with the
process of aging, it may also be related to disuse atrophy resulting from
Additionally, age grading, a stereotyped perception of "appropriate" activities
of older people, may discourage some involvement in physical activity (Ostrow,
1984).

The findings in this study did not correspond with the literature on aging
and decreased physical activity. While the participants agreed that aging had
negatively affected their athletic prowess, they still enjoyed participation in a
variety of vigorous activities. Fred was amused that people seemed surprised
he was still active “at his age”. Charlie believed you either “use it or lose it”.
Thelma laughed at the fact she still wanted to play, but was determined not to
let the stereotypes interfere with what she wanted to do. Rose thought that
people, regardless of age, ought to continue to learn and participate in new
endeavors. This included physical activities. Future studies need to
investigate the perceptions of older adults concerning their abilities to engage
in physical activity and sport.

E. Personal Meaning

All of the participants were able to establish the fact that engaging in the
tennis lessons held some special personal meaning for them. Betty explained
that for her, just mastering the challenge of learning a new physical skill was
meaningful. She found tennis to be a relaxing yet fulfilling activity she hoped
she could continue to enjoy with others. Betty also felt good about the fact
that she was making the effort to exercise and do something positive for her
body. Her ego received a boost from getting herself motivated to participate in
early morning exercise.
Like Betty, Fred enjoyed the element of accomplishment in mastering a physical activity. However, Fred repeated that he still found intense competition to be what he considered most personally meaningful to his sport participation. He explained that he had been competitive in sports for forty years, and was unable to “just drop it”. Since he felt he could not compete on the same level as he once did, having fun and staying in shape have come to be meaningful aspects of his continuing engagement in physical activity.

Charlie explained that he liked the exercise component he received from playing tennis, but what really interested and motivated him was keeping track of the score. While he said that competition was no longer important to him, Charlie still enjoyed trying to outperform his opponents. He thought it was important to exercise and learn physical activities that can be played throughout the life span.

Thelma found movement to be personally meaningful because it sustained her sense of well-being. Further, she expressed that her body always felt better for having participated in something physically active. She described how she experienced more energy and felt more awake and alive. Thelma was also motivated by activities that she deemed as “fun”. Another meaningful
point Thelma mentioned was her belief that physical activity helped people temporarily forget their troubles.

For Rose, again one of the most meaningful aspects of engaging in the tennis class was the opportunity to learn a new physical activity. She would like to become a good enough player to feel comfortable inviting others to play with her. Her goal was to learn enough about tennis to continue to engage in the activity for exercise and her own personal enjoyment. Rose liked outdoor activities and was interested in things she could do for exercise when the weather was nice.

Literature on personal meaning suggested that people will participate in activities that provide them with an intrinsic sensation of pleasure and satisfaction, or in extrinsic activities leading to a sense of accomplishment and worth (Jewett & Bain, 1985). The attributes associated with participation in sport include socialization, vertigo, catharsis, health and fitness, ascetic and aesthetic experiences (Kenyon, 1970). Commitment to sport has also been linked to fun and pleasure, pride, social approval, and a favorable self-image (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989). Haggard and Williams (1992) add that participation in physical activities affirms valued aspects of our identities. It would appear that the participants in this study supported the theory that sport could be
personally meaningful to their lives. Betty and Rose experienced a sense of
close and mastery towards learning a new physical activity. Fred and
Charlie discussed the element of competition and their feelings of
accomplishment. All of the respondents expressed their thoughts about
exercising as beneficial to their bodies, and spoke of how participating in the
tennis classes gave them increased energy and an overall sense of well-being.

F. Learning

All five participants in this study were well educated individuals still
strongly interested in the concept of learning. The women, particularly,
remembered being good students and enjoying their school days. All of the
women obtained college degrees, and all have held careers outside of the home.
The two men in the study were also college educated, but took a more
instrumental approach to learning. Though they felt that education was
important, they spoke about their own instructional experience as being more of
a means to an end than something they simply enjoyed for its own sake.

Betty told me she had maintained her love of learning throughout her life.
She cannot understand, she said, why a person might not be interested in
learning new things. Betty believed there was too much to discover about the
world to ever become bored. She also felt that while she might not master
information quite as quickly as she had in her youth, she was still very
competent in this domain.

Thelma remembered really enjoying her school years. She loved learning
languages and music, and especially delighted in acquiring the skills necessary
to pursue a variety of physical activities. Thelma explained that she had always
been able to "pick things up" easily, and that this had not changed much as she
grew older.

Rose liked school, and remembered that being a good student was
expected in her household. She mentioned that she had always enjoyed
learning new things, and still liked to challenge herself in an intellectual manner.
Rose thought that learning not only stimulates the brain in positive ways, but
adds spark to life by keeping one from getting stale. Like Betty, she considered
herself a good learner, though perhaps not as quick as she was in her younger
years.

Fred had a different perspective on his educational experience.
Although he eventually went on to college and earned a degree, his public
school years were something of a hardship due to his early illness. In fact,
acquiring polio put him two years behind his classmates in school. According
to Fred, this previous difficulty forced him to develop both a strong willpower and strict self-discipline. Ultimately, he managed to catch up and graduate with his peers. Now, Fred takes great interest in educating himself on information and activities he finds relevant or useful. He considered himself to be his own best teacher. Fred spoke of life as a learning opportunity. His overarching philosophy on learning is that “you have to learn to survive”.

Charlie helped with a tutoring program at a local elementary school. He sincerely believed in the benefits of schooling, explaining that education can keep a person from becoming “a drain on society”. While he holds this view and is himself quite knowledgeable and opinionated about current events, government, and politics, Charlie no longer considered himself an able learner. As for the tennis class, he thought it was too late for him to learn new information or change the way he had always done things. His habits and strokes, he felt, were too ingrained. As for other kinds of learning, Charlie told me he had not learned anything new for a long time. Once an avid reader, Charlie said he could no longer focus and concentrate on a book for longer than 10 minutes before getting sleepy.

Interestingly, the findings in the current study suggested that these women and men had different perspectives on the issue of learning. While all
the respondents were college educated, the women had a more intrinsic appreciation for the educational process. All three women described themselves as strong students. They had enjoyed their school years, and still liked to challenge themselves in intellectual directions. All of these women felt that while they might not be quite as quick as they once were, they still viewed themselves as capable learners.

The men, however, took a more instrumental approach to the educational process, seeing it more as a means to an end than an enjoyable and intrinsically beneficial phenomenon. For example, Fred was interested in learning about information he found helpful or useful, like buying stocks and commodity investing. He believed himself to be his own best teacher. Fred viewed education as necessary for survival.

Charlie believed he had not learned anything new in years. Because of his advanced age and his short attention span, he perceived himself to be a poor learner at this stage in his life. His attitude was that it was too late for him to learn any new information.

The literature on the adult learner suggests that there are three types of students: The goal-oriented learner who uses education to accomplish an objective, the activity-oriented learner who seeks social contact and activity,
and the learning-oriented learner who seeks knowledge for knowledge’s sake (Houle, 1961). It would appear that the participants in this study could clearly be categorized in one of these three classifications.

Question 2:

What factors Positively Contribute to the Learning Process?

The five participants in this study mentioned educational factors which they believed were most important toward contributing to the learning process. Betty pointed out that the frequent feedback she received, both positive and negative, had helped her the most. She also liked the fact that the instructor took a casual, relaxed approach to the lessons, making her feel more comfortable and at ease. Because of the “less serious” instructional methodology used by the instructor, Betty did not feel the tension she sometimes perceived as a student in school. Betty noted that the instructor was “fun”.

Thelma agreed that the tennis instruction was very good. She liked the fact that Stuart sometimes worked with each student individually and formulated specific comments and critiques. Thelma mentioned that Stuart never got angry or upset with them for making mistakes. Sometimes, during a drill, he often called her back and gave her an additional chance if she missed
the ball the first time. Thelma believed in Stuart, trusting him to be a knowledgeable expert of the game. In addition, since she was also there for a work-out, Thelma appreciated the fact that the instructor kept the group moving, not allowing time for them to simply stand around.

Fred reported that he learns best from “a person I feel easy with”. As a rule he does not like to take direction, but can accept critical feedback from someone whom he trusts and respects. He liked our teacher Stuart because he found him encouraging, calm, instructive, and personable. Fred said that Stuart “always gets out the big picture”, focusing on the more important fundamentals of the game. Like the others, Fred appreciated the fact that Stuart always had a positive comment for everyone.

Charlie believed that the most important quality of an instructor was enthusiasm. This attribute, Charlie explained, is a necessary ingredient of good teaching whether the pupils are children or adults. Charlie felt that Stuart, our tennis professional, was very enthusiastic, making the class both interesting and fun. Charlie also pointed out that knowledge of subject matter was essential for an instructor to be able to create a positive and meaningful educational experience for the students.
Rose, who had herself been an educator, had some specific ideas about good teaching. She spoke of a skillful educator as one who not only came to class well prepared, but who knew effective strategies for delivering appropriate information to students. She said that competent teachers are strong articulators, capable of delivering ideas and knowledge in ways that are clear, comprehensible, and easy to listen to. Rose thought it was important for teachers to give students opportunities for participation, to attempt new things, and to help students feel worthwhile as individuals. She believed that learning should be an overall shared experience. Rose said she was happy with Stuart as a teacher. She, along with the others, found him knowledgeable, friendly, encouraging, and fun. Rose felt that the instructor knew the skill level of each student, and was capable of making individual corrections without negativity. Finally, Rose mentioned that appropriate use of humor contributes to the learning process. She believed our instructor Stuart was skillful in implementing this technique into his lessons.

The findings in this study suggested that the factors contributing most to the learning process were associated with characteristics of the teacher. The participants in this investigation expressed a high regard for their tennis instructor, Stuart. They felt that what contributed most to their learning
process was the non-threatening environment Stuart had created, and the relaxed and positive approach he took toward providing tennis instruction.

The attribute most frequently discussed with regard to good teaching characteristics consisted of providing frequent feedback to the learners. Stuart was commended on his ability to work with each student individually and formulate specific comments, both positive and negative, about each individual’s performance. Additionally, Stuart was able to impart his negative comments with humor, an approach that won favor with his students. The respondents also preferred a “less serious” and “fun” instructional methodology, and spoke often about how their instructor never became angry or upset. They trusted and respected Stuart, finding him encouraging, calm, personable, and knowledgeable. The participants felt their instructor was an “expert”, and viewed him as being very enthusiastic. These were two qualities the respondents believed to be important to good teaching. Finally, every participant made the point that this instructor created the kind of situation that made them feel comfortable, supported, and worthwhile as individuals.
Question 3:

**What Andragogical Tenets Are Pertinent to the Learning of Physical Activity Among an Older Adult Population?**

In writing about the educative needs of adults and what constitutes good teaching for this segment of the population, Malcolm Knowles (1970) developed five tenets that eventually formulated his conception of andragogy. This philosophy of education is unlike the traditional pedagogical orientation, specifically because it is the experience of adulthood which totally separates adults from children. The five assumptions of andragogy which Knowles (1970) developed include: (a) a need to know why the information is important, (b) a need to be recognized as a fully capable adult, (c) a need to intersect learning with life experience, (d) a desire to learn that which might improve life situations, and (e) an approach to learning that is life-centered rather than subject-centered. Knowles' (1970) concepts of andragogy were addressed within this investigation.

In the first andragogical tenet, it was stated that adults must know why the information is important. The findings from the current study indicated that each of the participants felt learning and participating in the tennis course was relevant to their lives for a variety of reasons. A factor that held considerable
significance for them was their health and an overall sense of well-being. The respondents in this study recognized it was important for them to utilize their bodies in physically active ways. They spoke of their deep belief regarding exercise as vitally crucial for maintaining or improving health and fitness, positively affecting longevity, contributing to weight control, and providing them with more energy and a feeling of alertness.

Knowles' second assertion addressed the need to be recognized as a fully capable adult. The findings in this study indicated that the participants felt they were treated with respect and as equals by the instructor. They thought the information and corresponding drills were appropriate for their level of skill. They enjoyed the manner in which the instructor taught, finding him encouraging, calm, personable, and humorous. The participants were able to accept the instructor's comments, never feeling put down or marginalized by the educative experience. Clearly, the participants in the current study were treated as capable adults rather than as children or "old" people. It may be speculated that because the instructor was able to provide a safe, comfortable environment, the learning process was enhanced.

The third assumption, a need to intersect learning with life experience, was evident in the current study. All of the respondents had participated in
active, physical pursuits their entire lives. Many remembered playing tennis in their youth. Thelma stated that it had been 50 years since she had played the game, but saw no reason why she would not be able to pick it up again.

Additionally, all of these adults had succeeded in school, and all had college degrees. With the exception of Charlie, who felt he did not have the attention span he used to have, these participants viewed themselves as capable learners. They were not intimidated by the instruction or the learning process, and fully expected improvement with each lesson. Their experience with education and with physical activity had been positive throughout their lives, and it was not surprising that their attitudes toward learning or improving their tennis skills in this course were optimistic.

The fourth supposition, a desire to learn that which might improve life situations, is evident in the current study. When examining the participants’ motivations for engaging in tennis lessons, several interesting findings emerged and were brought out in the study. The reasons cited most frequently were related to a desire to improve health and to establish or contribute to relationships with others. For example, Betty and Rose wanted to improve their tennis games to the point at which they would feel comfortable asking others to play with them. Thelma, who lived alone, wanted to find new people to share
activities with. Charlie and Fred, who were also on their own, were good tennis players already. They used the course as a way to find new partners and connect with other people. Charlie commented that “you get to know people faster through sports than anything else”, alluding to his desire to foster relationships with others. All the respondents discussed extensively socialization factors which motivated them to engage in tennis and other physical activities. Learning and participating in this course was apparently perceived as useful for contributing to an improvement in their overall life situations.

The last tenet, an approach to learning that is life-centered rather than subject-centered, can be answered by the comments and observations obtained from this study. For example, while it was apparent that all of the participants enjoyed tennis, none of the members in this group expected to hone their skills to the point to where they would be competitive in leagues or tournaments. While the two men in the course, especially, mentioned they still very much enjoyed the competitive aspects of the game, they were primarily concerned with exercising, staying fit, and meeting new people. This was the case for all the respondents in the tennis course.
Recommendations for Further Study

Many aspects of ways in which mature individuals learn and ascribe meaning to physical activity still warrant further exploration. Based on the methods and findings of this study, several recommendations for future investigations related to the participation and learning patterns of older adults can be made. The following are suggestions for future research:

1. Develop grounded theory pertaining to learning needs of older adults through a greater number of interviews and analyses with a diverse population.

2. Formulate a survey instrument to quantitatively evaluate perceptions of older adults and facilitate generalizations and assessments with regard to learning motives and needs.

3. Study perceptions and characteristics of older adults from other geographical and environmental areas to ascertain similarities or differences regarding meaning, learning, and participation in physical activity based on the above factors.

4. Study meanings related to sport participation based on age specificity to determine similarities and differences between and within chronological classifications. These categories could be delineated by distinctions between
young-old (65 - 74), old (75 - 85), and the old-old (86 and older) (Ferrini & Ferrini, 1993).

5. Investigate the effect of race and class on perceptions toward learning and participation in physical activity to determine the extent to which these factors influence meaning for older adults.

6. Establish longitudinal research investigations analyzing the impact of childhood experiences on future and life-long participation in physical activity and learning.

7. Investigate alternative activities (e.g., bowling, softball) to ascertain the effect sport specificity has on the constructs of learning, participation patterns, and personal meaning among older adults.

8. Develop studies with dependent or institutionalized persons to understand needs and meanings regarding learning and physical activity among this segment of the population.
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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
May 2, 1995

Dear Director,

I would like to ask for your help and support in my doctoral research. I am pursuing my doctorate at The Ohio State University, in the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. My work at the university combines the study of personal meaning, physical activity, and adult education. For my dissertation, I would like to focus on the meanings of learning and participating in physical activity among older adults.

For this study I would like to observe physical activity classes and conduct interviews with some of the participants at your senior center. With the permission of yourself and the participating members, the interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed, and used as data along with field notes from the observations. Of course, the research will be anonymous and confidential. At any time, members participating in this research investigation may withdraw from the study, change or delete any part of the gathered information.

My goal is to find out what makes learning and participating in physical activity meaningful for older adults. This information is important because if we understand the needs of this segment of the population, we can prepare learning environments that are both appropriate and stimulating. The end result
may be that we help more people stay active, healthy, and involved in learning and exercise throughout the life course.

I deeply hope you find this study worthy and will support my efforts to begin this project at your senior center. If you have any questions or additional ideas about the direction of this research, please do not hesitate to let me know. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gayle Workman
344 Larkins Hall
West 17th Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43210
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE
BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: .................................................................Level of Education

Date of Birth:...........................................................Length of Residence

Place of Birth:.........................................................Parents’ Professions

Profession:..............................................................Number of Siblings

Relationship Status:......................................................Number of Children

What is your background in physical activity?

What do you find most meaningful about learning a sport skill?

How does learning new things make you feel?

What do you like most about learning something new?
# Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of birth:</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Length of residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status:</td>
<td>Number of activities</td>
</tr>
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</table>

1. What initially got you interested in this activity?

2. How long have you participated in this activity?

3. What do you like most about participating in this activity?

4. Is there anything you don’t like about participating in this activity?

5. What other new activities have you learned in the last few years?

6. How does this activity compare to the others you’ve learned?

7. Are there any other new activities you would like to learn?

8. What kinds of things interest you?

9. What kinds of leisure or sport activities did your family engage in?

10. What has helped you the most in learning and developing your skills in physical activity?
11. When you were in school, was there a special teacher who helped you, and what did she/he do to make learning better or easier for you?

12. Do you like learning new things?

13. Do you consider yourself to be a good student?

14. In what kinds of situations do you learn best?

15. What makes learning the most meaningful for you?

16. How would you describe effective teaching?

17. Do you think learning is a creative process?

18. How would you summerize your experience learning this particular physical activity?
APPENDIX D

SECOND INTERVIEW GUIDE
Second Interview Guide

1. How did you find out about this tennis class? How was it “marketed”?

2. What were the different ways it was presented? Newsletter? Poster? Word of mouth?

3. Was there a sign up sheet?

4. What could have been done to get more people to attend?

5. How are other activities for the center advertised?

6. How do you think sports are “marketed” to seniors? Is this group overlooked?

7. What would be your suggestions for getting the word out to seniors? How would you present your activity to get more people involved?

Knowles’ assumptions of adult education:

8. Is the information we are learning in tennis important to you?

9. Has it affected your life?

10. In the tennis class, do you feel recognized as a fully capable adult, or do feel you’re being dealt with like a child, or like an “old” person?

11. Does what you’re learning intersect in any way with your life experience?

12. Can learning tennis or any other physical activity improve your life situation?

13. How can learning be considered “life-centered” rather than “subject-centered”?

14. Is this the case for you?
15. What do you find meaningful about the learning of tennis or any other physical activity?

16. What factors most positively contribute to the learning process?
APPENDIX E

LETTER TO PARTICIPANT
Dear Participant,

I would like to ask for your collaboration in my doctoral research. I am pursuing my doctorate at The Ohio State University, in the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. My work at O.S.U. combines the study of sport, physical activity, and adult education. For my dissertation, I would like to focus on how mature adults learn physical activity, and the reasons which motivate them to do so.

For this study I would like to observe physical activity classes and conduct interviews with some of the participants. If you should agree to an interview, I would ask you to share with me some of your thoughts, reflections, and experiences regarding the learning process. I would be particularly interested in discussing your feelings about learning physical activity, and whether this has been a meaningful undertaking for you.

Your involvement would consist of two interviews with a total time commitment lasting between one to two hours. With your permission, the interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. Information you provide will be kept confidential. Access to the tapes will be limited to the investigators during this research study. Upon completion of the study, the tapes will be destroyed. The transcriptions of your interviews will be presented to you to insure that they reflect your voice and point of view. While consenting to participate, you may at any time stop the interviews, withdraw from the research, ask that some piece of information not be included, or request that observations regarding yourself or any part of your activity not be reported in this research investigation. Your wishes will be respected.
My goal is to find out what makes learning physical activity meaningful for adults. This information is important because if we understand the needs of mature individuals, we can prepare learning environments that are both appropriate and stimulating for this population. The end result may be that we help more people stay active, healthy, and involved in exercise and physical activity throughout the life course.

I deeply hope you find this project appealing, and decide to participate in it. If you have any questions or additional ideas about the direction of this research, please let either my advisor and principle investigator, Dr. Donna Pastore, or myself know. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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REFERENCES


