

**THE COMPARATIVE ROLE OF CHURCH AND SENIORS' CENTRE
PARTICIPATION IN THE TRANSITION TO WIDOWHOOD**

by

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The comparative role of church and seniors' centre participation

in the transition to widowhood.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the participation of older women in churches and in seniors' centres in relation to the transition to widowhood. Drawing upon the life course perspective, and conceptualizations relating to social support, coping strategies, and compensation, two research questions are addressed: How do older women utilize resources from organizational involvement to help their transition to widowhood; and Are there differences depending upon type of involvement (e.g., church versus seniors' centre [i.e., secular] involvement)? Semi-structured interviews are conducted with 15 women aged 69 and over, widowed 2-15 years, of middle socioeconomic status, and currently involved in either a church or seniors' centre. Data are analyzed qualitatively to determine themes related to the concept of control over the life course transition of widowhood. Eight themes are identified, relating to utilization of resources, supportive resources and life course restructuring. A major result is that both churches and seniors' centres provide some similar resources for women in their transition to widowhood. Major differences include the differential impact of belonging to a familiar cultural institution (church) or a relatively new organization in the lives of seniors (seniors' centres), the impact of other widows in the organization, and the role of professionals. Results suggest the need for further development of the concept of control over the life course and increased understanding of the characteristics of environments which make them supportive during transitions. Implications for service providers are discussed.

DEDICATION

For my grandmother, Irene Hall

-- a wonderful woman and a source of encouragement.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
List of Tables	x
List of Figures.....	xi

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Area of Study.....	1
2. Theoretical Framework.....	2
2. a. The Life Course Perspective.....	2
2. b. Criticisms of the Life Course Perspective.....	5
2. c. The Concept of Careers Within the Life Course Perspective.....	6
2. d. The Concept of Control in Life Course Transitions.....	8
2. e. Control in Life Course Transitions: Related Topics.....	11
2. e. (i) Social Supports.....	11
2. e. (ii) Coping Strategies.....	13
2. e. (iii) Compensation Thesis.....	13
2. f. Widowhood as a Transition in Which Control is Lost.....	14
3. Literature Review: The Church and Seniors' Centres.....	16
3. a. The Role of the Church in the Lives of Elderly People.....	16
3. b. The Role of Seniors' Centres in the Lives of Elderly People	20

4. Expected Results: The Role of the Church or Seniors' Centre in the Recovery of Control After Widowhood.....	24
5. Personal Resources and the Choice of Participants.....	26
6. Summary.....	28
Notes.....	28
II. METHODS.....	30
1. Introduction.....	30
2. Sampling Procedures.....	30
3. Characteristics of the Sample.....	34
4. The Interviewing Process.....	38
5. The Interview Schedule.....	39
6. Interviewing Technique.....	41
7. Data Analysis.....	46
8. Limitations of the Study.....	50
8. a. Sampling Procedures.....	50
8. b. Characteristics of the Sample.....	51
8. c. Pilot Study.....	53
8. d. Interviewing Technique.....	53
8. e. Interview Schedule.....	54
8. f. Data Analysis.....	55
Notes.....	55
III. RESULTS AND COMMENTARY.....	57
1. Types of Involvement.....	57
1. a. Church Involvement of Church Widows.....	57

1. b. Seniors' Centre Involvement of Seniors' Centre Widows.....	58
2. Reasons for Involvement.....	59
2. a. Participant Assessment of the Importance of Their Involvement	59
2. b. Church Involvement.....	59
2. c. Seniors' Centre Involvement.....	62
2. d. Summary of Reasons for Involvement.....	65
3. The Effect of Church or Seniors' Centre Involvement on the Transition to Widowhood.....	66
3. a. Utilization of Church and Seniors' Centre in Response to the Impact of Widowhood.....	67
3. b. Church and Seniors' Centre as Supportive Resources.....	72
3. b. (i) A Sense of Belonging	72
3. b. (ii) The Presence of Other Widows.....	74
3. c. (iii) Sharing the Experience of Widowhood.....	78
3. d. (iv) The Role of Professionals.....	81
3. c. The Role of Church and Seniors' Centre in the Process of Restructuring the Life Course During the Transition to Widowhood	91
3. c. (i) Continuity and Familiarity versus a New Venture.....	91
3. c. (ii) An Increased Sense of Independence	97
3. c. (iii) Changing Roles	100

4. Summary of Results: Transition to Widowhood.....	102
Notes.....	104
IV. DISCUSSION.....	106
1. Introduction.....	106
2. Control over Life Course Transitions: Similarities and Differences Between the Contexts of Church and Seniors' Centre.....	107
3. Related Concepts: Social Support, Coping Strategies, and the Compensation Hypothesis.....	112
4. Directions for Future Study.....	113
4. a. Developing the Concept of Control.....	114
4. a. (i) Attentiveness.....	114
4. a. (ii) Supportive Environments.....	115
4. b. Development of Methodological Approaches.....	116
4. c. Development of Substantive Issues.....	117
5. Implications for Service Providers.....	119
APPENDIX A. Interview Schedule.....	121
APPENDIX B. Letters to Priests and Directors of Seniors' Centres.....	135
APPENDIX C. Descriptions of the Study.....	137
APPENDIX D. Informed Consent Form.....	141
REFERENCES.....	142

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Description of participants.....	35
Table 2 Participant assessment of the importance of their involvement	60
Table 3 Membership of widows in either church or seniors' centre according to length of involvement	92

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 The development of themes	48
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CHAPTER I

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Area of Study

This thesis combines a number of sub-areas in the study of adulthood and aging: the lives of older women; religion and aging; and perhaps most important, life course transition/change. What are some of the ways people determine the directions they will take; what are the personal resources that become part of the process of adult development? Of particular interest are those times when the direction of life is radically changed and people are confronted with decisions about what should or could come next in their lives. What social forces move people in certain directions and what inner processes of the individual determine the choices made at those times of crisis? In sociological terms, these interests encompass a concern with transitions in the subjective career of individuals based on the life course perspective.

The life course perspective is an approach in which lives are conceptualized as pathways, the directions of which may be influenced by a variety of factors. This research, based upon the life course perspective, is concerned with how older women utilize social supports as they move through the significant transition to widowhood.¹

Little attention has been paid to the ways in which individuals, in the context of primary social groups, negotiate or determine the direction their life pathways will take (Hagestad, 1990). With specific reference to widowhood, there is a need to explore the impact of participation in social groups on the transition to widowhood, in order to better understand the dynamics of the

transition. In particular, this research focuses on the way the church and seniors' centres are utilized by widows as they attempt to regain control over the direction of their life course. The specific research questions are:

How do older women utilize resources from organizational involvement to help in their transition to widowhood? Are there differences depending upon type of involvement (e.g., church versus seniors' centre [i.e., secular] involvement)?

The framework for this investigation lies in the concept of control over life course transitions as described by Elder (1985b)². By their actions individuals can, to some extent, determine the direction and outcome of their life course. People are most likely to engage in activity designed to control the direction of their life course during significant transitions, such as widowhood. The transition to widowhood is marked by changes in societally-defined status, role(s), self-concept; and it is a time when women are faced with the need to make decisions concerning the future direction of life without a husband. In terms of the life course perspective, this represents a time during which there is a need to recover control over the life course. Of interest here are the ways in which widows who are members of a church and widows who are members of a seniors' centre utilize these organizations as they seek to gain control over the transition to widowhood.

2. Theoretical Framework

2. a. The Life Course Perspective

The life course perspective is influenced by age stratification theory, as developed by Riley, Johnson, and Foner (1972). The basic premise of age stratification theory is that the members of a society or social system can be grouped into different age-related strata which are defined by either

chronological age (or some other identifiable physiological, psychological or social developmental stage). This theory postulates that the members of a society are divided into age strata because the ability of individuals to perform certain social functions and to participate in particular social roles is dependent upon, and changes with, age. To maintain stability in society, different expectations, responsibilities, rights and privileges are associated with each age stratum, and each age stratum then contributes in unique ways to the functioning of society according to the age-determined abilities of its members. Each new birth cohort is socialized into the succession of age-related roles (i.e., members are trained to perform activities appropriate to their age). Thus aging is not only the progression of physiological change with time; it is also the movement of individuals through age strata as they gain, participate in, and leave social roles.

Influenced by age stratification theory, the life course has been described as a pathway marked by age-differentiated stages through which individuals move (e.g., Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985) and as "a sequence of social positions that define the boundaries and major junctures of adulthood" (O'Rand, 1990; p. 137). Aging is marked by a movement between status incumbency and status transition (O'Rand, 1990); the sequence of transitions and statuses is socially and culturally defined. Movement along the pathway occurs in an orderly fashion; individuals conform to age-associated roles because they have internalized the expectations associated with particular life periods (Hagestad, 1990).

Research within the life course perspective can be categorized according to the emphasis placed on three temporal foci (Hareven, 1978; Marshall & Rosenthal, Unpublished): (a) individual time - individual aging in terms of

chronological years and psychological developmental stages, (b) historical time - long time processes and discrete events that create the historical context of changes in age and aging, and (c) social time - the timetable of roles and norms defined by age. Research which focuses on individual time tends to be concerned with stages of psychological development rather than the social and sociological aspects of aging and development (Marshall & Rosenthal, Unpublished). Attention to historical time has resulted in a focus on cohorts as they move through socially determined age strata and the ways in which cohorts differ as a result of social change across historical periods (Marshall & Rosenthal, Unpublished). Life course research focused on social time examines socially recognized life-course events and stages. Drawing from the ethnographic work of anthropologists concerned with age grading, it is assumed that, "societies create age-related social transitions" and "assign social meaning to the passage of life time" (Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985; p. 36). People internalize expectations of what is to happen at particular ages, thus norms about age-appropriate behaviour define the structure of the life course (Marshall, 1980). (It should be noted, however, that there is debate about the strength of internalized age graded expectations in complex societies such as Canada [Gee, 1990]). The present study fits within research based on social time; widowhood has come to be identified as an expectable life course event for older, married women (Matthews, 1991).

The distinctions between normative and interpretive sociology, as applied to life course research, result in methodological differences. Life course research with a normative bent tends to rely on quantitative methods, using techniques such as surveys. Interpretive approaches to the life course make more use of qualitative methods, such as the personal narrative, in order to

better understand the ways in which individuals make for themselves a life story, how they give meaning to life events, and how they "weave together the many threads of a life into a single tapestry" (Neugarten, 1985; p. 298).

2. b. Criticisms of the Life Course Perspective

The life course perspective has been heavily influenced by normative schools of thought in sociology. Therefore, it tends to be deterministic in its understanding of the behaviour of individuals. It "seldom recognizes the active part taken by individuals, both in fashioning their own life course and in helping to collectively change the social structure of the life course" (Marshall & Rosenthal, Unpublished; p. 24). While some formulations of the life course perspective have included a more interpretive approach to aging, (e.g., the individual portrayed as an active actor in the development of his or her life pathway [Elder, 1985b]), interpretive sociology has not been a dominant influence in research done using the life course perspective.

Research in the life course perspective has highlighted the study of social roles, rewards and obligations, and the ways in which internalized social roles provide individuals with expectations for appropriate behaviour (Ryff, 1986). People (including elderly people) are assumed to act as expected according to their status and in conformity with others in their age category (Marshall, 1980). This has led to a neglect of the heterogeneity of age groups (O'Rand, 1990). The variety among the life courses of individuals within a society is lost (Marshall, 1986). Research has also been marked by an implicit acceptance of social inequality (e.g., in terms of gender and class) with the result that existing social arrangements are assumed to be non-problematic, and the aging experience is decontextualized (Marshall, 1986). Finally, the

functionalist influence of age stratification theory on the life course perspective has resulted in a focus on roles and behaviours deemed crucial - crucial because they are functional for the survival of the larger society. A great deal of social life is left unexplained (another example of the loss of heterogeneity), because many aspects of people's lives do not, or are assumed to not, fit this criterion and are not studied (Marshall, 1986).

In spite of these criticisms, the existence of age strata cannot be completely denied since "market, state and family related institutions channel individuals into differentially rewarded statuses using age as the primary criterion of allocation" (O'Rand, 1990; p. 132). For example, the state acts to standardize age strata through structures such as compulsory school ages and mandatory retirement age. The traditional arrangements of family life in our society tend to standardize age strata particularly for women, with the normatively expectable life course being ordered as marriage, children, empty nest and widowhood.

Nevertheless, there is a need is to go beyond assumptions that passage over the life course through age strata is invariable and mechanical. Inter- and intra-cohort variation as roles and statuses are attained, maintained and lost over the life course need to be explained (O'Rand, 1990).

2. c. The Concept of Careers Within the Life Course Perspective

The Chicago tradition of sociological analysis, with its emphasis on the study of individual histories and careers, has also been influential to the life course perspective (Elder, 1978), particularly with respect to research concerned with social time. The concept of career in the life course has been developed by Glen Elder Jr. (1978), who uses the term trajectory.³ A trajectory

is "a pathway defined by the aging process or by movement across the age structure" (Elder, 1985b; p. 31). It is not confined to any one sphere of life; rather, an individual's life can be thought of in terms of "multiple, interlocking trajectories; their scheduling and management is one aspect of life course development" (Elder, 1985b; p. 45). This is the long view of the life course, which "is marked by a sequence of states and events in which people move from one state to another" (Elder, 1985a; p. 17). Embedded within trajectories, and providing the short view of the life course, are transitions⁴. A transition is a more or less abrupt change in state, a movement from one state to another within a trajectory (Elder, 1985b). Transitions may be age graded or have no relationship to age and may be expected or unexpected (Elder, 1985a). To understand a transition one must have some understanding of the trajectory within which it is embedded (Elder, 1985a), of the temporal context of the transition, and of the resources brought to the transition by the individual (Elder, 1985b).

It is possible to view life trajectories in different ways. Recent interest in life histories and biographies has highlighted the issue of the distinction between objective and subjective views of life trajectories (Hagestad, 1990). Life trajectories can be studied objectively as aggregate patterns of behaviour on a macro-level (the approach demonstrated by the historical study of cohorts) or they can be studied "as they are subjectively constructed on an individual level" (Hagestad, 1990; p. 157).

The distinction between objective and subjective careers has tended to parallel that between normative and interpretive approaches to the life course. In general terms, life course research with a normative focus sees individuals as occupying positions in an age stratified society, and considers the ways in

which their behaviour is structured by sets of rules or norms (Marshall, 1980). A normative perspective focuses on objective careers, a series of clearly defined, age-related statuses through which individuals and cohorts progress (Keith, 1990). Within an interpretive approach, the focus is on the ways in which individuals interpret and make sense of life events and how that process of interpretation is related to certain behaviours (Marshall & Rosenthal, Unpublished). The difference is one of focus. In the normative tradition people are socialized into roles; in the interpretive tradition people actively attempt to make sense of their experiences and act strategically in their own interests (Marshall, 1986).

2. d. The Concept of Control in Life Course Transitions

A key concept in the discussion of careers or trajectories from an interpretive perspective is that of control (Elder, 1985b; Marshall, 1980). Humans, as actors in a situation, have some control over the outcome of situations (Elder, 1985b) and are able to impose their own definition on a situation (Marshall, 1980). The idea of control is a direct attempt to counteract the deterministic and ordered assumptions of life course research influenced by normative traditions. An impact of this approach on life course research is a focus on the ways in which individuals seek to control transitions and thus maintain control over the life course. The concept of control as understood within the life course framework, is presented by Elder (1974, 1985b), whose work is influenced by that of pioneer sociologist W.I. Thomas.⁵

When events occur in people's lives which result in a break in customary habits of behaviour (Elder, 1974), the result is an inability to maintain prior expectations of outcomes. Thomas referred to these events as "crisis situations":

So long as social life runs smoothly, so long as habits are adjustive, "situations" can be scarcely said to exist. There is nothing to define when people behave as anticipated. But when influences appear to disrupt habits, when new stimuli demand attention, when the habitual situation is altered, or when an individual or group is unprepared for an experience, then the phenomenon assumes the aspect of "crisis".

(Thomas, in Volkart, 1951; pp. 12-13)

Thomas argued that people faced with a crisis situation respond with "attention", that is, they take note of what is happening and then act in ways designed to establish new and adequate habits and patterns of behaviour. Crises evoke the need to reconstruct one's life organization in order to bring about a new level of adaptation, where adaptation is "a harmonious relation between individual claims and individual control over the environment" (Thomas, in Volkart, 1951; p. 173).

The ways individuals regain control over the life course (i.e., the construction and reconstruction of life organization) depends on the interaction between the individual and his or her environment (Elder, 1974; 1985b; Thomas, in Volkart, 1951) . Environmental factors support the possibility of adaptive response to a situation by providing "social options (perceived and objective), adaptive requirements or situational demands, and support from others in shared resources and social reinforcement" (Elder, 1974; p. 10). Individuals, in response to events which have upset their expectations and normal patterns of behaviour, may look for new methods and experiences in order to regain control, or they may limit their activities and accept approaches that have been well developed by the society in which they live. Individuals may or may not try to solve the problems they are faced with, and there may be great variety in the complexity of solutions which different individuals develop. Thus, individuals faced with an event which upsets their life organization (such as widowhood) may attempt to maintain old patterns of behaviour, trying to

reestablish the old form of stability by using previously developed responses to crisis events. Or they may attempt to find new ideas and approaches to the situation, perhaps developing more complex coping strategies and solutions to the crisis than is found in their environment (Thomas, in Volkart, 1951).

The assumption underlying this approach is that individuals produce and have some measure of control over the outcomes of life course transitions (Elder, 1985b):

Life plans are based on concepts or definitions of the future life course. Revised thinking about the future prompts new life course planning - the situation has changed. As a means of controlling social reality for personal needs, the individual in Thomas' analysis devises general schemes of situations with goals, a life organization with a plan for subsequent action. This organization represents a continuing "project" of construction and reconstruction as new experience is encountered that cannot be assimilated. The more drastic the change in life experience, the more one's life organization must be recast and the more the transition marks a probable turning point in trajectory. Major crises, then, are times that increase the likelihood of reorientation in life structure, direction, and purpose. They are times that make life planning a conscious act.

(pp. 45-46)

Changes in the situations within which people find themselves lead to changes in the way in which life is organized. Both Thomas (Volkart, 1951) and Elder (1974, 1985b) argue that in response to the crisis, individuals act adaptively, that is, they utilize resources and survey options in order to regain control over their environment or situation. Control may be regained by adjusting expectations of outcomes, increasing resources, redefining a situation (Elder, 1985b), redefining the self or others, restructuring or clarifying goals, or assuming a new status or role (Thomas, in Volkart, 1951). To some extent, the possibilities for action are dependent upon the context of the situation (Thomas, in Volkart, 1951). The individual must begin to make choices, but the choices

are enhanced or hindered by resources available in the social setting of the individual or within the individual himself or herself (Elder, 1985b).

An age graded life course offers the possible resource of some preparation for transitions (such as widowhood in elderly women). However, transition to a new role will always bring about some loss of control over the situation for the individual (Elder, 1985b). In general, transitions will show different levels of loss and recovery of control depending on the resources of the individual,⁶ the availability of social support, and the extent to which people are prepared for the new situation (Elder, 1985b).

2. e. Control in Life Course Transitions: Related Topics

Research on widowhood and other events in the lives of elderly people, based on a variety of sociological and psychological traditions, provide different ways of understanding the nature of adjusting to life course transitions. In this section, topic areas related to the concept of control in life course transitions are briefly described. These are social supports, coping strategies, and the compensatory hypothesis.

2. e. (i) Social Supports

A social support system may be defined as "that set of personal contacts through which the individual maintains her social identity and style of life. The support system can be economic, service, social, or emotional" (Matthews, 1980; p. 150, based on the work of Lopata). Social supports should preserve physical and psychological functioning (Wister & Strain, 1986; p. 206). Social support can be divided into two functional types. The first type, instrumental or task oriented support, consists of actions which help people such as widows

with the more mundane aspects of life such as chores, shopping, errands, and physical care if needed (Schuster & Butler, 1989). The second type of support is affective or emotional support. This kind of support comes from people in whom the bereaved confides, talks to when upset, and who often initiate contact with the bereaved.

Another way to describe social support is in terms of the structure of the network of supporters, the number of helpers, the strength of relationships between bereaved and helpers, and the similarities and differences in the characteristics of supporters in a particular network (Bass & Bowman, 1990). This aspect of social support is generally measured in quantitative terms. An example of this kind of support is the finding that the number of widows in a newly widowed woman's network has an effect on her adjustment (Matthews, 1980).

A recent trend in the study of transitions has been to "argue that transition patterns are to an important degree shaped on a primary group level within limits set by social institutions" (Hagestad, 1990; p. 161). Termed the mesolevel of social context, it entails an inclusion of such groupings as communities, work organizations, friendship groups, and family (and we might add the local parish church or seniors' centre), and an analysis of their impact on life course trajectories and transitions. It is within these environments that social support occurs, and within which individuals negotiate a transition, seeking to define the situation and to regain control over outcomes. Hagestad (1990) suggests that primary groups serve as resources by providing a source of meaning in new situations and by providing a framework and set of interpretations of values and expectations of the transition.

2. e. (ii) Coping Strategies

Two general types of coping strategies are available to people facing difficult periods of life (Koenig, George & Siegler, 1988). Instrumental strategies involve an attempt to change the situation using problem-solving strategies. Palliative approaches involve an attempt by a person to regulate his or her emotional response to the situation. Passive, emotion-focused coping behaviours tend to be used more often by older people. Religious attitudes and behaviours (both private activity and group involvements) tend to represent palliative strategies. For example, religion may provide a way of giving meaning to an event or of gaining perspective on what has happened; that is, religious behaviours may change the appraisal of a stressful event (Koenig, George & Siegler, 1988; Beck, 1987). Events are cast as less threatening and the person attains a means of achieving control in a situation (such as the death of a husband) in which the individual perceives she or he has little control. The meaning of the event (e.g., hopeful versus hopeless) might be affected by involvement in religious organizations. Shared common worldviews and a store of previous experiences and ways of coping may help a member of a religious organization who is experiencing a major life transition (Beck, 1987).

2. e. (iii) Compensation Thesis

Lopata (1973) suggested three possible ways in which widows might respond to the loss of their husband: a) eventually return to the levels of activity and involvement they had before being widowed; b) find new roles and with them, new friends; c) live in isolation. The choice of response is affected by the availability and nature of social supports (such as the availability of activities that do not demand the presence of a husband) and the personal

characteristics of the widows (such as level of education and finances). In early writings on the subject, Lopata (1972, 1973) suggested that generally older women are not equipped with the necessary skills to engage themselves in an urban society and an ageist, sexist, classist, and couple-oriented society sets up barriers which block the full participation of old, female, and poor widows. The result is isolation.

More recently, Ferraro (1984, 1990) argues against the use of disengagement theory and a decremental thesis for widowhood (which underlies the work of Lopata [1972,1973]), based on lack of empirical support. He suggests a compensation thesis based on continuity theory in which the life style and activities of women tend to persist relatively unchanged as they move through the transition to widowhood. Losses in one area are often replaced by activity in another. While widowhood is a crisis in which isolation and some decrements in health are observed, most widows recover. After the initial period of bereavement, participation does not decline even when widowhood occurs at advanced ages. The process is one of realignment of relationships and activity, not isolation. Ferraro's compensation thesis provides another perspective on the process of regaining control during the transition to widowhood.

2. f. Widowhood as a Transition in Which Control is Lost

The event of widowhood, considered from the perspective of the subjective career, marks a point at which control over the life course is lost. Studies of the stress related to the event of widowhood compared to other life events, finds that widowhood is consistently rated as one of the most stressful life events (Matthews, 1991). Grief may overwhelm the personal resources of the widow and her ability to determine the direction of her life course is clearly

threatened. A widow can be expected to feel loneliness (Matthews, 1980; Wakin, 1980), a sense of futility, an inability to understand the loss, and numbness or the need to avoid the feelings of loss (Barrett, 1977). A widow may feel that her fate is not just and may want to blame someone or something for the loss (Barrett, 1977). Grief has been accompanied by both physiological and psychological symptoms such as the inability to sleep, eat, or carry out daily activities, and depression characterized by a sense of defeat and apathy (Perlmutter & Hall, 1985). As described by Matthews (1991), "the early bereavement period is typically associated with profound psychological disorganization" (p. 23).

For some women, widowhood is accompanied by economic consequences (Matthews, 1991)⁷. The death of a husband may lead to a disruption in financial stability through loss of income and increased worries about financial situation.

For widows who experience the event of widowhood as described in research, control over the life course is lost as customary habits of behaviour are disrupted and as the emotions which accompany grief are experienced; in some instances, the loss is exacerbated by economic disruption. Additionally, previously held expectations for the direction of the life course, in as much as they included the husband, must be reconsidered. Recovery from the impact of widowhood involves a re-organization of self-concept and world-view which acknowledges the loss (Perlmutter & Hall, 1985). The loss of the husband often means the loss of a key person in a married woman's sense of self, and may result in the development of a new identity as a second class citizen (Matthews, 1991). The loss of the husband may also mark the end of some social involvements and friendship networks (Matthews, 1991; Beck, 1987).

The focus of this thesis is to investigate the ways in which widows may utilize involvement in either church or seniors' centre in order to regain control over their life course. However, before considering the possible ways in which involvement may serve to help widows regain control, it is necessary to review research which has considered the ways in which church and seniors' centre involvement affects the lives of older people, and widows in particular.

3. Literature Review: The Church and Seniors' Centres

The literature on widowhood among elderly women and on the role of churches and seniors' centres in the lives of older people provides a backdrop for this thesis. Research considering the role of either the church or seniors' centres in the bereavement process of elderly widows is sparse; none was found which specifically investigated the way in which these organizations were actively utilized by widows in order to recover from the effects of the death of their husbands.

Sub-sections 3. a. and 3. b. survey research which describes the impact of the church or seniors' centre, respectively, on the lives of elderly people in general and widows specifically (where available). This review of the literature sets a context for section 4 of this chapter, which considers the ways involvement in either a church or seniors' centre might provide opportunities and resources for recovery of control over the life course.

3. a. The Role of the Church in the Lives of Elderly People

Very little research deals specifically with the transition to widowhood in terms of involvement in either a church or seniors' centre. The research which does exist, as well as research which has focused on the impact of church

involvement on the lives of older people in general, is presented here. There are two ways in which religion may be seen to have an effect. First, the clergy may serve as a resource for widows. Very few researchers have investigated this aspect of the role of the church, and the findings of those who have are contradictory. Matthews (1991) cites the extensive study of widows conducted by Lopata during the 1970's in which Lopata comments on the conspicuous absence of the clergy as a resource for the widows in her study. However, other researchers report that widows found the clergy to be both present and helpful, particularly in the role of professional listeners (Matthews, 1991).

Second, the church may have an impact on the lives of elderly people, and widows in particular, as a result of its nature as both a religious and social organization. In the discussion which follows, research which has addressed the ways in which the church has been shown to affect the lives of older people is reviewed.

To begin this discussion, religion is defined as the beliefs and values which people hold and the activities which they perform as a result of a perceived relationship with some power/being which they understand to transcend humanity (Koenig, Kvale, & Ferrel, 1988). Religion claims to answer questions about the meaning and purpose of life (Whitworth, 1978). Two functions of religious institutions are "first, to communicate a belief system and provide an opportunity for worship and expression of faith; second, to meet the social needs of their members" (Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988; p. 49). A general distinction in religious behaviour is made between institutional or group related behaviour (e.g., church attendance and involvement in other organized religious activities) and personal behaviour (e.g., individual beliefs and values

and non-organizational activities such as private prayer) (Koenig, Kvale, & Ferrel, 1988).

While there is debate about whether people become more religious as they age, Gallop polls in the United States consistently reveal that the older segments of the population are more likely to consider religion important and to participate in religious activities (personal and corporate) than are younger people (Moberg, 1990). Data from the first Canadian General Social Survey (Statistics Canada, 1985) reveal that in British Columbia 32% of people aged 55 and over attended church in the month prior to the survey, compared to 15% who attended a seniors' centre. In Canada as a whole, "church is the most popular activity for those 75 and over and is the only activity reported by a majority of the population in this age group" (Statistics Canada, 1985; p. 197).

High levels of religiosity among older people may be the result of religion being an area in life which is less influenced by the effects of aging. Religious resources such as beliefs, communal supports, and private devotion are not as susceptible to the effects of loss which accompany aging, and may therefore gain importance in the view of the older person (Koenig, Kvale & Ferrel, 1988). Related to this, older people may experience a decline in activities which they and others perceive as useful; religious behaviours become a source of compensation. Some research reports that, next to families, the church is the major source of friendships and inter-personal resources which reduce loneliness for older people (Moberg, 1990; Beck, 1987).

Religious behaviour has been positively correlated to various measures of life satisfaction, well-being, and happiness (Hunsberger, 1985; Koenig, Kvale & Ferrel, 1988; Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988; and Moberg, 1990). Attendance at church worship services and involvement in other church related

activities generally have been found to be positively correlated to high levels of morale (Beck, 1987; Koenig, Kvale & Ferrel, 1988).⁸ Only health has a greater impact on psychological well-being (Koenig, Kvale & Ferrel, 1988; McGloshen & O'Bryant, 1988). Church attendance and membership are associated with successful adaptation after the death of a spouse, and are also associated with more positive attitudes toward death (although some research has found a relationship between higher death anxiety and church affiliation) (Koenig, Smiley & Gonzales, 1988) . Data from the Duke longitudinal study (cited by Koenig, Smiley & Gonzales, 1988) indicate that the relationships among adjustment to aging, feelings of happiness and feelings of usefulness, and overt religious behaviours (such as church attendance) are higher than the relationships among the same three indicators of well-being and religious attitudes. Thus it is not simply private prayer or religious attitudes which have a positive impact on life satisfaction.

The religious nature of church activity, in addition to the social interaction which accompanies church attendance, has its own effect (Koenig, Kvale & Ferrel, 1988; Koenig, Smiley & Gonzales, 1988). When the impact of activity in the church is compared with the impact of activity in other organizations such as fraternal groups, veterans groups and clubs, the church is the only organization in which affiliation has a positive association with well-being (Koenig, Smiley & Gonzales, 1988; Moberg, 1990). This suggests that the relationship between church affiliation and morale involves something more than social support gained by being with others.

Religion may be a coping strategy used by some older people. When religion was offered as one of a number of coping strategies on a checklist, it was rated highly by older people asked how they coped with crises or difficult

periods in their lives (Koenig, Smiley & Gonzales, 1988; and Koenig, George & Siegler, 1988). Faith in God, and private or personal religious activities such as prayer and reading the Bible are the most often offered spontaneous coping strategies (and are examples of palliative coping strategies). Religious group activities, such as attending church, becoming involved in church activity, and receiving support from church friends and minister, (i.e., instrumental coping strategies) are also mentioned but not as frequently (Koenig, George & Siegler, 1988).

Thus religion may act as a palliative coping strategy for widows. A perspective on life may be gained by recent widows who attend worship services, since religion may provide a sense of both the spiritual nature of life (particularly faith in an afterlife [Beck, 1987]) and a belief that there is order in the world (McGloshen & O'Bryant, 1988). The oldest cohorts in our society may have a greater familiarity with religion, thus religious behaviour and thinking may be incorporated into the individual's response to a stressful situation (Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988). "Religious beliefs further provide structural guidelines for dealing with life transitions (i.e. death, bereavement, illness), and religious organizations uniformly provide rituals for cushioning the stressful effects of such changes" (Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988; p. 96). In one study on bereavement (Duke longitudinal study), religious faith was found to stabilize emotions (Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988).

3. b. The Role of the Seniors' Centre in the Lives of Elderly People

A seniors' centre⁹ is an organization developed as a result of community planning, offering a variety of activities and services (e.g., recreational, educational, health, counselling, information and referral services) to older

adults who live independently in the community. It is usually located in its own facility, open for activity and programming at least five days a week, five hours a day with regularly scheduled activities, and operated by a paid staff and/or a core of volunteer seniors.

There is debate about whether seniors' centres are primarily social agencies providing services to disadvantaged elderly people, or voluntary organizations, open to anyone and offering opportunities for self-expression and social interaction, among other things (Ferraro & Cobb, 1987; Krout, Cutler, & Coward, 1990).¹⁰ Probably most centres function as both voluntary organizations and as agencies providing services (Ferraro & Cobb, 1987; Krout et al., 1990; Taietz, 1976); the definition developed above is intended to convey a sense of the seniors' centre as both. The importance of this dual feature of seniors' centres *vis à vis* the present study is that the seniors' centre should provide a variety of resources for regaining control over the life course during the transition to widowhood. Seniors' centres may operate as resources to widows in the following ways: providing for referral and emotional support within its formal structures; providing informal friendship support; and being a place to keep active and maintain a sense of self worth through participation.

There are a number of limitations with the research done on seniors' centres to date. Perhaps the biggest drawback as it affects this study is that no research dealing specifically with the impact of seniors' centres on widows has been done. Also, the research cited here is based on data from the United States, which may affect the applicability of findings to the Canadian context. The following is a review of previous research, highlighting relevant findings to develop a context for the present study.

The majority of studies are concerned with the demographic, health, and social psychological characteristics of users versus non-users (Ferraro & Cobb, 1987; Ralston, 1987). Findings are often contradictory, perhaps because studies have tended to draw small samples, to be limited to one centre only, or to draw from different and noncomparable community settings (Krout et al., 1990).

Centre participation is not predicted by any one variable, but by an array of variables, such as education and income (Krout et al., 1990). This makes it difficult to determine the importance of seniors' centres in the lives of widows. While the nature of seniors' centres as places in which to socialize may attract widows seeking to initiate social contact (Hanssen, Meima, Bucksman, Henderson, Helbig, & Zarit, 1978), marital status and loneliness are not predictors of participation (Krout, 1988; Ralston, 1987), but living alone is (Demko, 1979; Krout et al., 1990). Frequent attenders tend to be those who are disadvantaged in some way and see the centre as a social agency. Long time attenders view the centre as a voluntary organization, are generally satisfied with their lives, and are socially active (Ferraro & Cobb, 1987; Schneider, Chapman, & Voth, 1985). Participants generally have a positive attitude toward aging (Hanssen et al., 1978), and have strong social networks and a history of involvement with organizations (Hanssen et al., 1978; Taietz, 1976). Seniors' centres attract people who are interested in social activity; however, this finding is based on correlational data and thus the meaning of the attraction has not been explored (Ralston, 1987).

Research tends to be quantitative. For example, duration and frequency of attendance is measured rather than the quality of participation and what participants gain from their involvement (Ferraro & Cobb, 1987). At a different

level of analysis, the number of programs and the diversity of types of activities are measured (based on the assumption that "more is better" and indicative of success) rather than the quality of programming and its effectiveness (Ralston, 1987).

In studies where questions about reasons for involvement are asked, responses generally fall into two categories. First, people get involved for friendship reasons, either to see friends (many join at the invitation of a friend [Krout, 1989]) or to make friends (Krout, 1983; Ralston, 1987). Thus the centre may serve the function of providing an opportunity for social interaction. Demko (1979) reports that his informants referred to a number of social losses (e.g., death of spouse, loss of friends, etc.) as the reasons for attending a centre. Second, some seniors' centre participants express a desire for, and enjoyment of, activity associated with seniors' centres or a desire for something to do with their time (Krout, 1988; Krout et al., 1990). Others enjoyed volunteering and felt the activity kept them healthy (Krout, 1989). In contrast, non-users of seniors' centres often cite their non-involvement as due to being too busy with family and friends and other activities (Ralston, 1987).

Few studies directly measure the impact of involvement in a seniors' centre, and those which do find that seniors' centres have little effect (Ralston, 1987). There is no relationship between participation in seniors' centres and objective health measures (although participants tend to perceive themselves as healthier than non-participants) (Schneider et al., 1985). There is also no correlation between frequency of attendance and level of life satisfaction (although level of activity is correlated to life satisfaction and therefore attending a seniors' centre might indirectly have an impact on life satisfaction) (Toseland & Sykes, 1977). Caution is needed because the research in this area is sparse.

4. Expected Results: The Role of the Church or Seniors' Centre in the Recovery of Control After Widowhood

As argued above (Section 2. f.), widowhood represents a life course transition which is characterized by the loss of control over the life course. The recovery of control over the life course during a transition depends upon the ability of individuals to act adaptively, for example, to adjust their expectations of possible outcomes, to increase and utilize resources, or to change their definition of the situation (Elder, 1985b; Thomas in Volkart, 1951). The research literature reviewed in Sections 3. a. and 3. b. contains suggestions regarding the ways in which involvement in a church or seniors' centre might be useful to widows in terms of regaining control. While this study does not make specific hypotheses, and while it is anticipated that the interview data will reveal unexpected results, following is an outline of expected findings in terms of the role of church and seniors' centre involvement. These suggestions also are meant to focus the discussion within the framework of the life course perspective and the concept of control over transitions.

The most obvious way in which both church and seniors' centres may act as resources in the process of regaining control over the life course for widowed women relates to social support. It is not expected that either church or seniors' centre will be described as sources of instrumental or task oriented support; however, participants will be asked whether they received practical support as a result of their involvement, in order to determine whether this type of support from either organization had a role in the process of re-organizing the life structure after widowhood.

It is expected that affective or emotional support is more likely to be described by participants. In the church, the sources of this kind of social support might be the clergy, other members, and, depending on the composition of the congregation, other widows. In seniors' centres, staff, peer counsellors, and widow support groups, as well as other members (particularly widows) may serve this function. The ability to express feelings to these supporters, as well as feelings of closeness to those in her social network which may provide a forum within which to consider her situation and see the options, may be a resource which widows utilize in order to aid in restructuring their lives.

A more specific example of the way in which this form of support may be useful to widows results from the ambiguity with respect to proper mourning in western cultures. Generally, elaborate or emotive public displays of grief are not encouraged; mourning is described as 'perfunctory' and 'deinstitutionalized' (Barrett, 1977; p. 858). The freedom to grieve in the company of others (such as at a funeral or in the context of worship services, or in a widows' support group at a seniors' centre, and perhaps in informal settings with friends) may provide opportunities for widows to manage the feelings associated with grief, and to begin to develop a new self-concept as widow.

Social support is also described in terms of the structure of the network of supporters (Bass & Bowman, 1990). In the case of the church and seniors' centre, awareness of the presence of other widows may act as a resource. In some cases, formal groups (e.g., in the form of widows' support groups) may be available and may help widows negotiate a new identity as widow by providing models and a place to discuss the new life situation.

Ferraro's (1984, 1990) compensation thesis suggests a need to explore the ways in which women reorganize their lives as widows. Women may utilize activities in the church or seniors' centre, in order to restructure their lives. Findings from previous research suggest that churches and seniors' centres may be resources in the following ways. First, they provide the opportunity to keep active and to do something with time. Activity is a way of compensating. Second, widows may find their involvement meaningful, especially if they become involved as volunteers. These two possibilities represent the process of restructuring life activities that accompanies the loss of customary patterns of behaviour with bereavement. To some extent they may also represent the process of developing a new self concept as widows find ways (other than wife) to think of themselves.

In summary, churches and seniors' centres may be utilized by women to regain control over the life course during the transition to widowhood in three ways. First, the two organizations may act as sources of social support for the process of re-organization (e.g., clergy, grief support groups). Second, they may provide structures around which widows may be able to restructure their own lives (e.g., activities, friendship networks). Third, they may provide opportunities for women to develop a new self-concept as widow (e.g., identification with other widows).

5. Personal Resources and the Choice of Participants

While the impact of personal resources on the transition to widowhood is not the focus of this study, an awareness of these factors is important since personal attributes influence the process of regaining control over the life

course (Elder, 1985b). A review of the literature in this area reveals that some characteristics are helpful to women as they make the transition to widowhood.

Good health (Arling, 1976; McGloshen & O'Bryant, 1988), high levels of education (Lopata, 1973; Arling, 1976; Barrett, 1977), and adequate economic resources (Arling, 1976; Harvey & Bahr, 1974) are important in increasing the ability of widows to avoid isolation (Arling, 1976). Educated widows appear to participate in more activities (Arling, 1976). In a study of lower class widows, lower income affected social participation because it was associated with lower car use (Atchley, 1975). The ability to use coping strategies which kept them busy and involved rather than isolating themselves, is helpful to widows (Blackburn, Greenberg, & Boss, 1987). In the initial period of widowhood, widows rely on family support, but those who adjust best to widowhood eventually provide for themselves by developing new skills, friendships, and involvements in other activities (Blackburn et al., 1987). A positive self-concept prior to the death of the spouse is helpful; women with low self-esteem seem unable to initiate the needed process of reorganizing their lives and tend to become isolated (Blackburn et al., 1987).

As much as possible, these variables are used to determine participation in this research. Potential participants are screened in terms of personal resources such as income, education, health and other sources of social support which might affect their approach to being widowed. Women who have been widowed less than two years are not interviewed since research indicates that family support tends to dominate in the initial period of bereavement and that a wider network of people (such as friends, church and other social activities) becomes important later (Blackburn et al., 1987; Bass & Bowman, 1990). The selection of participants on the basis of personal resource similarity

focuses this study on the impact of involvement in a church or seniors' centre on the transition to widowhood.

6. Summary

This thesis is a study of the ways in which women utilize resources from either church involvement or seniors' centre involvement in order to make the transition to widowhood. The theoretical framework of the study is based in the life course perspective; more specifically, the study draws on the concept of careers within the subjective life course in relation to the ways in which individuals act in order to regain control over their life course during transitions. Widowhood is understood as a transition during which women are faced with the task of restructuring their lives and developing a new identity as widow. A review of previous studies which have described some of the ways in which churches and seniors' centres have an impact on the lives of widows, suggests that these two organizations may act as resources for regaining control over the life course in the following three ways: (a) through social support for widows as they attempt to re-organize their lives, (b) by providing structures around which widows are able to reorganize their lives, and (c) by providing opportunities for women to develop a new self-concept as widow.

¹Approximately 85% of the widowed in Canada are women, the majority of whom are over the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 1989). Whether expected (Matthews, 1987) or not, widowhood is an important life transition for older women. Adjustment to widowhood has received considerable attention in social science research (e.g., Lopata, 1973, 1987; Matthews, 1991).

² Influential on Elder's (1974, 1985b) formulation of control over the life course is W.I. Thomas (Volkart, 1951) whose work also will be included when appropriate and helpful to the discussion.

³The terms trajectory and career are used interchangeably here.

⁴ Transitions are also referred to as status passages (e.g., Marshall, 1980).

⁵Thomas' work precedes the formulation of the life course perspective. However, in Elder's description of the nature of control during life course transitions (e.g., 1974, 1985b), the

influence of Thomas' writings on crisis situations is evident. While Thomas did not write in terms of life course transitions, his descriptions of crisis situations - their impact on people, the ways in which people responded, and sources of support from the environment - are a useful for understanding the nature of control over the life course. The source for Thomas' work is a collection of his writings, compiled by Volkart (1951).

⁶Resources of the individual include both personal resources (e.g., strength of character) and socially constructed resources (e.g., economic security). See Matthews (1991) for a discussion of various personal resources and their impact on a woman's experience of widowhood.

⁷Matthews (1991) notes the difficulties which exist in terms of defining "poverty". Additionally, variability among older widows results from the variety in their economic resources and financial histories. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence to support the position that economic hardship is a common correlate of widowhood.

⁸However, some studies have found no correlation between church activity and well-being (Koenig, Kvale & Ferrel, 1988).

⁹There is a variety of definitions of a seniors' centre in the literature. The definition used in this study is based on the summary definitions of Krout (1989) and Ralston (1987), and on the present researcher's personal experience with seniors' centres.

¹⁰The debate is based on the United States context where the approach to service delivery is different to that of Canada. It is difficult to make any generalizations regarding the model that better fits Canadian or British Columbian seniors' centres. In general, seniors' centres tend to be highly influenced by their community context in terms of the level of funding, formal planning and the perceived need of people (Krout, 1989). While there are commonalities among seniors' centres, there is no such thing as an average seniors' centre or centre user.

CHAPTER II

II. METHODS

1. Introduction

The data for this thesis were collected using an interview schedule developed by the author (Appendix A). The interview includes a combination of descriptive questions, example questions, verification questions and open ended questions (Spradley, 1979). A pilot study using the proposed interview schedule was carried out with a widow who belongs to the Anglican church and one who belongs to a seniors' centre, in order to change questions which might have caused confusion and to determine the time required to conduct the interview. Minor changes were made to some questions. The data from the pilot studies were incorporated into the results. Six widowed women, members of the Anglican church, were recruited through contact with the priest of their parish; seven widowed women, members of seniors' centres, were recruited through contact with the directors of various centres (final $N = 15$). The churches and seniors' centres were located in three communities in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The data gathered in the interviews were analyzed qualitatively to identify themes which expressed the impact of involvement in either a church or a seniors' centre on the ways in which the women interviewed made the transition to widowhood.

2. Sampling Procedures

A purposive (Babbie, 1983) or judgmental (True, 1989) sampling procedure was employed. The goal was to understand the experiences of

widows and the role of involvement in two particular social organizations in the negotiation of the transition to widowhood -- rather than to generalize. As described in the literature review, a number of factors can affect women's adjustment to the event of widowhood. In an attempt to limit the influence of factors other than church or seniors' centre involvement, and to strive for similarity between the women in the two organizations, the original goal was to sample women with specific characteristics: 70 years of age and older; widowed for 2-5 years; members of a church or seniors' centre at the time of widowhood; no major financial concerns; self-rated as having good health compared to other women their age; at least some high school education; and some family member(s) with whom they were in regular contact. Various forms of random sampling would not easily have resulted in a sample with these specified characteristics.

To generate a purposive sample, letters (Appendix B) were sent to 12 Anglican priests and 5 directors of seniors' centres in three communities (one urban, two suburban) in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. These municipalities have both a number of seniors' centres and Anglican churches. In the community from which the majority of widows from seniors' centres were recruited, none of the churches had priests at the time of the study, and therefore no church widows were recruited from this community. The working and middle class nature of the communities helped ensure some measure of similarity in the pool of possible respondents. Church affiliation was limited to the Anglican church because it is familiar to the author and because it might be expected that the expression of faith and belief and the patterns of involvement in church activities vary by denomination.

The letter sent to priests and seniors' centre directors included a brief introduction to the researcher, a statement of the characteristics of the widows required for the study, and the promise of a follow-up telephone call. Attached to the letter was a description of the study (Appendix C), the same one which would eventually be given to prospective participants. One to two weeks after the letters were sent, a follow-up telephone call was made to the priests and centre directors.

Letters were sent to 12 priests. Some of the priests reported no women who met the requirements, some did not respond to the initial letter or telephone calls, and some had moved. Four priests, acting as formal gatekeepers (Seidman, 1991), suggested widows who might participate based on the description of the characteristics of participants needed. Three of the priests spoke to the women to explain the request and passed on the name only if the woman agreed. It is not known how many women, contacted first by these priests, turned down the request. The fourth priest simply suggested names to the researcher without first consulting the widows. Together, the four priests suggested 11 women; of these, 9 agreed to take part in the study.

Due to some ambiguity in the introductory letter sent to the priests, some of the 9 women had been widowed longer than the 2-5 years initially targeted (some as long as 30 years). Rather than automatically rule out these women, they were contacted and an in-person discussion was conducted in order to determine their suitability for the study. For example, such things as the clarity of their memories of the events at the time of the death of their husband, their past and current church involvement, and their response to some of the questions which linked church involvement and the transition to widowhood, were considered. Based on these discussions the upper limit of the length of time of

widowhood was extended for both groups. Of the 9 women who had agreed to take part, 6 were deemed to meet the requirements of the study, and a complete interview was conducted with them.

The recruiting process in the seniors' centre followed a different process. At two centres, the directors invited the researcher to set up an information table. While this was done on two occasions at each centre, it was not a productive approach. Permission was then given by the directors to speak to some of the various activity groups which met on a regular basis, in order to introduce the project and to ask directly for volunteers. The study was described briefly, including the characteristics of widows being sought. In order to maintain some similarity with the sample from the churches, the upper limit of five years of widowhood was presented but not stressed. This approach resulted in 12 women who expressed an interest in being part of the study. Four were unsuitable (e.g., had recently remarried, had been separated from husband at the time of his death). Many of the women had been widowed longer than five years; again a brief discussion was conducted in order to determine whether those who exceeded the five year limit might be suitable. An important factor in determining the suitability of these women was the length of time between being widowed and joining the centre, since very few had belonged at the time of their husband's death. Those who had been widowed for longer than 15 years and had only recently joined a seniors' centre did not readily make connections between their widowhood experience and their involvement in the centre. Accordingly, 6 women were considered suitable and agreed to be interviewed. A seventh participant from a seniors' centre was a woman who was referred by a staff member after noticing an information sheet left on a bulletin board.

At the other three centres, one director did not return telephone calls, one director referred a possible participant who could not be contacted, and one suggested a notice be placed on the bulletin board, but did not seem hopeful about the prospects. It was decided to focus on the two centres offering greater contact with members.

The process of recruitment described above resulted in 6 participants who were members of a church and 7 participants who were members of a seniors' centre.¹ The two other participants in this study were those who agreed to take part in the pilot study. One was a widow known by the researcher; she belonged to an Anglican church which was not included in the general recruitment of participants. The other was a widow, referred by a colleague of the researcher, who belonged to one of the two seniors' centres. Neither woman lived in the general neighbourhood of her church or seniors' centre, although both lived in neighbourhoods comparable to those of the women recruited through priests or directors of seniors' centres. Both women who participated in the pilot study had been widowed for more than five years; however, both had been widowed within the range of time represented by the final sample (under 15 years). No questions were changed significantly as a result of the pilot study; therefore the responses of these two women have been included as part of the results.

3. Characteristics of the Sample

The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. A total of 15 women were interviewed for this study; 7 belonged to the Anglican Church of Canada and 8 belonged to a seniors' centre. The two groups of women were similar in terms of background characteristics. Their age range, length of

Table 1 - Description of participants

Descriptor	Church women	Seniors' Centre women
1. Age Range	70-87 years	69-90 years
2. Length of time married ¹	22-56 years	25-57 years
3. Length of time widowed	3-15 years	2-13 years
4. Family contacts	(one participant-28 yrs ²)	
a. children living in close proximity; regular in-person contact	5	5
b. children living at a distance; regular telephone contact and some visits	2 ³	2 ³
c. no children	0	1 ⁴
d. participants with no regular contact with any relatives	0	0
e. participants who rated their relationships with relatives "fulfilling"	7	8
5. Employment		
a. never employed	0	1
b. employed before married and/or for a short period in early married life	3	5
c. employed before married and sporadically during married life	1	1
d. employed before married and for most of married life	3	1
e. kinds of employment	office, factory, sales, commercial artist	telephone operators, office, factory, sales, restaurant manager
6. Education level attained		
a. no response (interviewer error)	1	1
b. grade school	2	0
c. some high school	1	4
d. high school graduation	2	3
e. post secondary school	1	0

¹All except one participant had been married only once. One church widow had married for a second time when she was 28 years old.

²The decision to include this participant is based on the criteria outlined in Chapter II.

³All except one widow from the church had other relatives (e.g., grandchildren, siblings) with whom they had regular in-person contact.

⁴Participant had nieces, nephews, and in-laws with whom she had regular in-person visits.

Table 1 (continued) - Description of participants

Descriptor	Church women	Seniors' Centre women
7. Financial Status⁵		
How would you rate your financial status?		
a. I am well off financially - I have more than enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and enjoy myself as I please	1	1
b. My financial situation is comfortable - I have enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and spend money on some extras	3	5
c. My financial situation is adequate - I have enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and I do not worry about unexpected expenses	2	2
d. My financial situation causes me some concern - I have just enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) but I would be unable to meet unexpected expenses	1	0
e. My financial situation is extremely stressful-I often worry about meeting the costs of my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and I would not be able to meet an unexpected expense	0	0
8. Health rating		
How would you rate your health compared to other women of your age:		
a. Excellent	1	2
b. Very good	3	4
c. Good	3	2
d. Fair	0	0
e. Poor	0	0
9. Limits to activity caused by health	4 (limits to walking)	4 (limits to walking)
<i>N</i>	7	8

⁵Participants were asked to rate their financial status according to the categories supplied.

married life and length of time widowed were almost identical. All had a least one family member with whom they had regular and fulfilling contact. There were slight differences in employment and education levels (more of the church women were employed throughout married life and more had completed high-school). In terms of self-rated financial status and health status they were essentially the same - relatively healthy, active women, in an at least adequate financial situation.

It soon became apparent that it would be very difficult to maintain the criterion that the women belong to either a church or a seniors' centre; these were active women. Women ($N = 9$) with multiple involvements were placed in a category according to the organization from which they had been recruited. Following is a brief description of the women *vis à vis* other involvements.

None of the church members relied on the church as their sole source of social activity. All belonged to other social groups such as senior's centres, service clubs, volunteer organizations, ethnic groups, and card groups. One is on the board of a seniors' centre; three others who belonged to seniors' centres attended some activities but held no official positions. They joined after their husband had died. One widow recently attended a grief recovery group (which was not formally affiliated with a church) and one reported activities with friends and travelling as an important involvement other than church.

Two of the participants from seniors' centres did not belong to any other organized activities, although both referred to weekly, informal lunch meetings with friends (unrelated to the seniors' centre). The rest belonged to organizations such as the church, bridge clubs, and garden clubs. Five attended church, two of whom had belonged all of their lives and were very active in church events. The others regularly attended worship services; one

had joined in late adulthood and two had joined soon after their husband died.

4. The Interviewing Process

It was originally planned that the first part of the interview would be conducted over the telephone. This section of the interview included questions which were intended to screen participants as well as to begin the process of gathering basic information (e.g., demographic information, level and type of involvement in either a church or a seniors' centre). The two women who took part in the pilot study commented that talking over the telephone was tiring and long. The first participant contacted requested that we meet for the entire interview rather than conduct the first part over the telephone. As a result of these responses, the format was changed so that the entire interview was conducted in person.

As a result of the need to determine the suitability of some of the women who agreed to take part in the study, in-person interviews were begun with 17 women of which 4 were terminated part way through the interview (see footnote 1). This was not the most efficient way to determine suitability. However, it was necessary since the original decision to limit the time of widowhood to no longer than 5 years had become unworkable, and accepting only those who had belonged to the organization at the time of the death of their husband narrowed the field of possible participants too drastically.

The time and place of the interview was arranged at the convenience of the participants. At the time of the interview, the women were asked if they would be willing to have the interview taped; all agreed. The pilot study interviews had not been taped but extensive notes were taken. The participants

were given a copy of the description of the study and were asked to read it and then initial a copy for themselves and a copy for the interviewer. They were then asked to read and sign two copies of an informed consent form (Appendix D). One was given to them, the other kept by the interviewer.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format (True, 1989). For the most part, questions were read directly from the interview schedule in the order in which they appeared, although questions were sometimes rephrased. Participants sometimes gave responses that answered questions not yet asked. The interviewer responded to what was being said, sometimes pursuing the topic with the relevant questions found later in the interview, and then continued the interview. Later in the interview, when the topic appeared again, the questions were read and they were asked if they had anything to add. The interviewer asked clarifying questions and, in some cases, explored responses with questions which do not appear on the interview schedule. As previously noted, the sample was not restricted to women who were involved in only a church or a seniors' centre. This allowed the interviewer to ask participants some questions about involvement in the other organization, and to use that information to clarify what they were saying about the organization of primary interest.

The interviews lasted an hour and a half on average. The longest interview was three and a half hours, the shortest just over an hour.

5. The Interview Schedule

Part 1 of the interview covers demographic information and major life events. The items in this section were used to screen possible participants to ensure some level of commonality among participants on variables which have

been shown to affect adjustment to widowhood and levels of involvement in activities (Arling, 1976) (e.g., economic status, health and education level). Part 2 involves questions about current involvements, also intended to be part of the screening process, to ensure that the widows who participated did not have multiple involvements which might confound the pursuit of information about one particular involvement. Part 3 deals with the levels and kinds of involvement the widows had at either the seniors' centre or the church. The questions here were intended to reveal the nature of the participant's involvement in her particular organization and how that involvement may have changed during the time surrounding her husband's death. The overall purpose of parts 1, 2 and 3 was to provide a sense of each woman in her particular context, somewhat like a guided mini-tour as described by Spradley (1979). Part 4 is concerned with feelings about widowhood, practical needs as a result of widowhood, changes in self as a result of widowhood, and the identification of social support. These "reflections on widowhood" were investigated in terms of the respondent's retrospective thoughts about the time immediately after widowhood and her thoughts regarding the present. In Part 5, questions attempt to ascertain the connection between the transition to widowhood and the possible ways in which the church or the seniors' centre was helpful. Questions were developed based on research literature which describes the issues faced by widows and the influence of involvement in formal organizations. The first set of items in this part were example type questions (Spradley, 1979); participants were read a statement, and asked to rate their level of agreement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). They were then asked to provide examples or experiences which demonstrated why they had responded as they had. The rating scale worked with the pilot study, but after two or three

interviews it became an encumbrance. The focus on a numerical response became a distraction as the women attempted to give a numerical value to their level of agreement. Eventually they were asked to simply agree or disagree with the statement and then describe an event or experience which would demonstrate their response. The interview concludes with Part 6 in which the participants were asked about their personal spirituality apart from any involvement in formal religious organizations. The inclusion of this section was partly to determine whether there is a distinction between church activity and personal spirituality for those who are church members, and partly to explore the issue of spirituality among older women regardless of church affiliation.²

6. Interviewing Technique

There is debate concerning the type of interaction and the nature of the relationship which should and should not occur, between the interviewer and the participant. Most commentators state that the interviewer should remain neutral, rarely sharing personal experiences or opinions, making the participant feel at ease but not becoming too friendly, avoiding conversation beyond the basics of courteousness (see, for example, Babbie, 1983; True, 1989; and Seidman, 1991).³ The interviewer must strive for control, including a controlled rapport (Seidman, 1991) which conveys enough warmth to elicit trust, but not enough to elicit friendship. Interviewer vagueness about his or her own life ensures that the interview does not become a social occasion (True, 1991), and neutrality on the part of the interviewer ensures that he or she remains a medium through which the questions and answers are conveyed (Babbie, 1983).

Using a feminist perspective, Oakley (1981) criticizes the assumptions of the traditional approach to the interview relationship. She argues that maintaining a position of neutrality is unrealistic in in-depth interviewing when sensitive issues are often pursued. Participants ask questions; unwillingness to answer them honestly and thoughtfully can just as easily close an area of response as ensure an unbiased response. Intimacy comes with reciprocity. Neutrality, distance and vagueness on the part of the interviewer are contradictory to the goals of establishing rapport and developing trust so that the participant feels comfortable sharing his or her thoughts and concerns. In addition, Oakley suggests that there is an exploitive element to the traditional approach; interviewees are considered sources of data. From a feminist perspective the goal of research should be to create a sociology for women, not of women. To that end it is necessary to view interviewing as an opportunity for women to articulate and have recorded their own life accounts. This cannot happen in a setting in which the interviewer sets herself apart from the interviewee. Interviewing becomes an interactive event in which the responses of the interviewer cannot help but cause the interviewee to reflect on her experiences more than she would had the interview not occurred. For some of the women Oakley interviewed, the interaction fit what might be called a therapeutic listener model in which the women interviewed found an opportunity to talk about their experiences (some very painful) with someone other than a family member. For those women the experience became part of their process of emotional recovery.

In the current project, the perspective advocated by Oakley was adopted. I enjoy talking to older women; they are a group with whom I have had much professional and personal experience. The widows interviewed for this study

were seen as having valuable experiences to share about the process of negotiating an important life event. My interest in their stories came from wanting to learn more about the kinds of things they did to get through the crisis, and the impact that their involvements had on coming to terms with loss.

For some of the widows the pain of the death of their husband was still very close to the surface of their emotions; it was difficult to not offer verbal sympathy when faced with their distress. This meant that at times the discussion included reminiscences and stories not "on topic". Given that bereavement is a process, it soon became apparent that for some of the women I was someone with whom the process could be continued. This is not to suggest that I took the role of therapist, but elements of some of the interactions indicated that thoughts and ideas were in the process of being sorted out and that the interview was part of that process. An example is found in the informal comments to me by the priest of one of the participants.⁴ This particular woman told the priest that the interview had given her much to think about. Since then she and the priest have talked further about her widowhood experience.

On a few occasions the participants asked questions about me. I tried to answer their questions truthfully, although like the participants, I reserved the right to privacy. Perhaps because I obviously did not fit the category of widow and was significantly younger, very few personal questions were asked about my private life and relationships. However, at one point I was asked if I was married as a participant tried to explain the meaning and feelings associated with losing a husband. It appeared that her way of trying to explain it to me was conditioned by her appraisal of my ability to understand the situation.

One area in which my personal convictions did have some importance for some of the participants was that of religiosity. For those women who

attended church it seemed important to determine at some point my own church affiliation. In these situations, my sense of the interview process was that their knowledge that I belonged to the same denomination created a measure of ease. It has been my experience that some Anglicans are defensive about their church affiliation. They are cautious about what they reveal and the people to whom they reveal it, in order to protect themselves from ridicule. Identifying my church affiliation enhanced the interview process. Seidman (1991) and others propose that attributes such as gender, age, and dressing according to the social class of the person being interviewed can affect the comfort level of participants and thus their willingness to respond. It may be that religious affiliation, when the topic of the study is religion, may also have an effect on the participant.

In the last section of the interview, all participants were asked about their personal faith apart from church affiliation. This part of the interview was often the most interactive - in a sense a discussion. Women (from both the churches and the seniors' centres) who previously had not asked me about my religiosity, often did at that point. Those who asked seemed more relaxed about conveying their thoughts and personal convictions once my church affiliation had been determined. Some women were not interested in my position and I did not offer it to them.

There are dangers with a less traditional approach to the interview process. First, "leading the discussion" is an obvious problem, as the agenda and interests of the interviewer may take on too important a role. Second, Oakley (1981) is concerned that the traditional approach to interviewing is essentially hierarchical: the participant is a supplier of data, the interviewer is a gatherer of data, and the head researcher is the one with final control and

authority over the process as he or she makes sense of it all. In the attempt to overcome this apparent power imbalance, it is necessary to be aware of other ways in which power operates. For example, with some of the widows there was a genuine sense that it was possible for interviewer and participant to exchange ideas without necessarily agreeing. But with others I realized (sometimes too late) that my role as the one asking questions meant that I was to be deferred to. Some participants wondered if their answers were wrong, and while I indicated that there are no right answers, some of the participants continued to hesitate. It may be that as interviewers we need to acknowledge that our role may have authority and power in the eyes of participants. For example, we may need to be sensitive to indications that a participant is attempting to determine the "correct" answer by questioning us. Denying that a power imbalance exists, or is perceived to exist by a participant, is to run the risk of creating a false sense of the interactive setting. Ignoring a participant's definition of the situation and the power he/she ascribes to the interviewer's role, may be another kind of barrier to hearing what is being said.

Participants' reactions to this interviewing style differ. One telling example is that a number of the widows commented that they still talk to their husbands. My grandmother still talks to my grandfather who died nine years ago, and so when a widow mentioned that she did this I would respond by telling her about my grandmother. In some cases, this led to further description of their interactions with their dead husband. In other cases, the discussion ended as the widow waited for me to move on. Without further investigation, it is not possible to explain the impact of the anecdote. For some, the anecdote may have meant that I did not think talking to a dead husband was strange behaviour, thereby giving acceptability to the topic; for others, it may have

added to their sense of loss, or represented too much familiarity with the interviewer on a topic they did not want to pursue with a stranger.

The following is another example of how people respond differently to interviewer style. A number of times I summarized what the participant had said. Sometimes this was met with a strong affirmative yes, followed by further response. Other times summaries were met with a "blank", or resulted in a question of clarification from the participant which led us off the topic and away from the participant's original train of thought. Finally, there were times when impatience with what I had to say was obvious.

It was evident that in some cases maintaining neutrality and distance, and simply asking the questions, was the best way to encourage a response. Sometimes exploring responses in a more conversational approach ended the discussion on a topic, while at other times the exchange helped to further the exploration.

To conclude, the style of interviewing utilized here does not correspond to traditional descriptions of interviewing technique. I, as the interviewer, was more involved in the interaction than is usually prescribed. There are strengths and weaknesses to this approach, and perhaps a need by qualitative researchers to better determine, and then respect, the type of interaction which each participant desires. Perhaps a superior approach is a situation of multiple interviews in which understanding and trust between the interviewer and the participant are able to develop.

7. Data Analysis

The tapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The approach was to read the transcripts in light of the concepts of subjective career (Marshall,

1980) and control over transitions (Elder, 1985b) presented in Chapter I. Themes were identified, and concrete examples highlighted, which demonstrated the ways in which these widows sought to make sense of what had happened to them, how they had acted in their own interests (Marshall, 1986) and the ways in which they attempted to control the transition (e.g., by adjusting expectations of outcomes, increasing resources, or redefining the situation) (Elder, 1985b). Marshall's and Elder's (and to some extent, Thomas') concepts of control over transitions were not meant to result in forcing the words of the participants into inappropriate categories. Rather the concepts were used as an organizing tool to ascertain whether or not churches and seniors' centres are part of the process of moving through a transition and the role they might play in that process.

The process of reading and identifying themes generally follows the suggestions and guidelines of Seidman (1991). Figure 1 is a schematic presentation of the process, outlining the evolution of the themes which eventually provide the structure for the presentation of the results in Chapter III. For the first reading, the transcripts were assembled in alternate order. A transcript from a widow attending a seniors' centre was read, followed by one from the church, and so on, in order to avoid the identification of themes relevant to only one set of widows. Each transcript was read with a series of questions in mind. The questions were paraphrases of the general concept of control over the life course as described in Chapter I (see the first column on Figure 1 for a list of the questions used). The responses of the participants which seemed to answer the questions were recorded. By the time half of the

Figure 1: The development of themes

STEP 1

Questions developed based on the concept of control over the life course. Transcripts read in alternating order from churches and seniors' centres, using the questions to identify themes

Questions:

- How did the participant attempt to make sense of what had happened to her?
- What words and phrases does she use to describe her involvement?
- Does she demonstrate ways in which she acted in her own interests?
- What did she do to make life better for herself?
- Who does she mention as helpful and what did that person do?
- Does she indicate that she changed her expectations about her life?
- Did she speak about widowhood and her involvement in either organization in ways that indicate she has changed as a result of her involvement?
- What does she say about the priest or seniors' centre staff?

STEP 2

Tentative themes identified and excerpts from the interviews compiled in separate computer files according to theme.

Tentative themes:

1. A sense of belonging e.g., the church as "family", feeling welcome, sharing experiences with other widows, the role of other widows
2. Organizations as places to respond to grief and loneliness e.g., the importance of keeping active
3. The impact of longtime involvement versus recent involvement in an organization
4. Identity issues e.g., creating a new life, self-identification as widow rather than wife
5. Making decisions about level of involvement
6. The role of staff, clergy, and structured events e.g., impact of worship and sermons, decisions to join grief groups
7. Role of the dead husband
8. Role of religious teachings
9. Active versus passive responses to the situation of widowhood e.g., impetus for joining, reflections on involvement

STEP 3

Excerpts compiled according to tentative themes are scrutinized further. Similarities and differences noted, some excerpts eliminated, themes refined and in some cases eliminated. New themes created.

Final themes:

1. Utilization of church and seniors' centre in response to the impact of widowhood
Ways in which the organizations helped the widows deal with loneliness and bereavement.
2. A sense of belonging
Expression of the feeling of "belonging" to the organizations
3. The presence of other widows
Other widows are helpful because of shared experiences
4. Sharing the experience of widowhood
Formal and informal opportunities to discuss widowhood
5. Role of professionals
The unique role of priests
6. Continuity versus a new venture
Similarities and differences among the widows based on the organization to which they belong, and their membership before, during and after the event of widowhood
7. Increased sense of independence
The impact of involvement on self-perceptions of independence
8. Changing roles
Opportunities for new roles in the two organizations

interviews had been read, some tentative themes had become apparent in the responses. Transcripts were read until new themes were no longer found (see the middle column of Figure 1 for a list and brief description of the themes identified at this stage of the analysis).

Once general themes were identified, the transcripts were read a second time, first those from the church widows as a set, followed by those from the seniors' centre. Reading the transcripts from one organization increased the sense of the women as a group, both in terms of similarities and differences within the group. Sections of each transcript were highlighted to indicate the various themes as they appeared in each interview. Highlighting of excerpts was done generously, that is, sections of the transcripts with tenuous relevance to the theme were included in order to avoid editing too early. The sections from all of the transcripts which had been highlighted were compiled as a collection of excerpts with one computer file constructed for each theme.

The compilation of excerpts for each theme was then read and a further process of organizing excerpts took place. Excerpts which were strikingly similar to each other, or strikingly dissimilar, were noted and grouped together to form subsections within larger theme areas. Decisions concerning the suitability of excerpts became more rigorous. Excerpts which now appeared to have little relationship to dominant themes or which did not address the issue of control over the life course were eliminated. Excerpts which had originally been grouped within a theme as a specific subsection were in some cases elevated to the status of a theme in their own right. This was done when it became apparent that the meaning of the subsection did not clearly reflect the larger theme, or when the ideas of the subsection appeared to be important enough to

be discussed separately. Some ideas which had stood out to the author in the first reading of the interviews were found to be minimally supported and were put aside for possible future investigation with a larger sample. After much winnowing and grouping of excerpts, eight specific themes were identified (See the third column of Figure 1 for a list and brief description of the final themes). These eight themes form the structure within which the results of the interviews are presented in the next chapter.

8. Limitations of the Study

8. a. Sampling Procedures

Participants were recruited differently from churches and seniors' centres. In the churches, priests suggested and in some cases contacted possible participants, while at the seniors' centres volunteers approached the researcher. The priests may have suggested widows with whom they had specific interactions about widowhood, which could limit the variety of views on the role of the church and, in particular, the role of the priest during widowhood. Priests may have discussed the study with participants based on the description sent to them, which may have led to some preparation by the church widows. Other methods of recruiting participants from churches (such as attending meetings as was done in the seniors' centres) would decrease the possible influence of the priest.

A larger sample might provide a wider cross-section of women from the two types of organizations. This could have been accomplished by extending the period of recruitment, increasing the number of churches approached, and pursuing further the directors of seniors' centres who were unenthusiastic in response to the initial contact.

Another problem encountered during the recruiting of participants was that all of the churches in one community were without a priest, with the result that none of the church widows came from that community. Most of the widows from seniors' centres came from that same community. There is no way of knowing whether something unique about this community may have affected the responses of the participants.⁵

8. b. Characteristics of the Sample

Some of the participants had been widowed longer than the originally planned two to five years. Therefore, for some of the widows the study entailed retrospective accounts. This means there is a reliance on memory, and the possibility that recollections were filtered through more recent events. For example, a woman widowed for longer than five years may only recently have begun to establish close friends in her organization. Looking back she may contrast her initial period of involvement with the present by describing a time when no one was helpful. Or she might project present levels of satisfaction onto her previous experience.

Nine of the women had multiple involvements, that is, they were members of both a seniors' centre and a church. Those with multiple involvements were not different to other participants in their levels of involvement in the organization from which they were recruited. However, the participants were not asked questions which might have indicated which organization was more important to them. Therefore, the question arises as to whether multiple involvements affects the responses of participants, particularly in a situation in which a widow was interviewed about the organization least important to her. For example, participants might minimize the impact of the

organization about which they are being questioned because they have compared the two organizations and have decided one is superior. Or, as seems to have happened in this study, the opposite can occur. Two participants recruited at seniors' centres who were also members of churches commented that the churches they belonged to did not provide them with enough social interaction, although they spoke highly of their ministers and the support he had given them during their initial bereavement period. The general tone of both their interviews was that the seniors' centre had been a "life saver". As a result they may have over-emphasized the positive aspects of the seniors' centre. More rigorous sampling to eliminate multiple involvements, or the inclusion of a question during the screening process to determine levels of importance of different involvements would have been useful.

It is important to point out that the purpose of the study was not to compare the two organizations in terms of which was more effective for widows, nor was the purpose to determine the comparative impact of each organization using quantitative measures of life satisfaction. The intent was to compare the two organizations in terms of the ways in which they were perceived by widows to be helpful. The interview questions provided clear focus on one particular organization. Five of the nine participants with multiple involvements made no comments about the other organization to which they belonged. Four participants raised their other involvement during the course of the interview and in response they were asked some comparative questions. However, throughout all of the interviews the focus remained on the organization from which the participant had been recruited, and all were able to provide many examples of ways in which the organization from which they had been recruited was helpful to them.

8. c. Pilot Study

It is unfortunate that the plan did not include taping the pilot interviews. Copious notes were taken; however, much of what these participants said was impossible to record. Reading the transcripts of the other participants sometimes led to new or revised understandings, a possibility lost with the two pilot interviews. The women interviewed as pilot studies raised a number of issues not mentioned by the other participants. Transcripts of their actual words would have been useful for reporting these differences.

The two women interviewed for the pilot study were not typical of the participants in general. Both had been involved in intense programs which they described as helpful in dealing with bereavement at the psychological level. In general, they were more self-reflective than the other participants. While they provided interesting insights concerning the role of the church and seniors' centres in the lives of widows, they were not good choices for the pilot study because both were adept and comfortable telling their story, they needed little prompting or probing, and in many cases they answered questions before they were asked. It was not until the schedule had been used with a number of participants that it became clear that some of the questions were confusing and repetitious. A pilot study which did not involve people known to the interviewer and her colleagues might have been more productive at this stage of the study.

8. d. Interviewing Technique

A detailed description of the interviewing technique and its strengths and weaknesses, is found in Section 6 above. In general, the attempt to move away from the traditional structure of interviews to situations of greater reciprocity (as

described by Oakley [1981]), results in a different set of limitations. The following is a summary of the limitations as encountered in this study.

To begin, the interactive nature of the interview raises the possibility of the interviewer "leading the discussion". While the discussion may seem reciprocal to the interviewer, it may be that the participant is simply following the lead of the interviewer. Second, while the attempt was to overcome the idea of the "interviewer as authority figure", there remained a sense with some of the participants that there were "correct" answers to the questions. Third, interviewing participants once only, does not allow for the development of an understanding of the style of interaction most comfortable for the participant. Thus, while some participants appeared comfortable with the interactive approach of the interviewer, it became apparent that others might have preferred a more formal kind of interaction.

8. e. Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was developed by the author. The problems with the pilot study and its ineffectiveness in terms of improving the questions have been discussed above (section 8. c.).

An omission of particular importance in the interviews of the widows from churches was the lack of a question which addressed the role of the husband's funeral. The church participants were asked whether they remembered a worship service as being particularly helpful, and the assumption had been that the funeral would be discussed at this point. A question specifically about the funeral was needed since none of the participants (or the interviewer) raised the issue at that point or any other during the interview. It may be that the timing of the funeral, usually when the widow is still in a period of shock and disbelief,

results in hazy memories. A specific reference may be needed to call it to mind. It may also be that, in retrospect, the funeral is not something that stands out as significant. Trying to explain why the central Christian ritual marking death was not mentioned as a key event by any of the participants attending church would make an interesting future study.

8. f. Data Analysis

Analysis of the data did not include a second reader of the interview transcripts, due to time and money limitations. The possibility exists that someone else reading the material would see different themes or emphases within themes. Also, the researcher read the transcripts with previous work in the area of widowhood and control over the life course as part of her background. Preconceptions could result in the ability to see only that which demonstrates the issues encountered in the literature. To some extent, the choice of themes may be both guided and limited by those influences.

¹In summary, as a result of the need to determine the suitability of some of the widows contacted, in-person interviews were begun with a total of 17 women, of which 4 were terminated part way through the interview (3 with church women and 1 with a member of a seniors' centre). The decision to terminate came during the section in which the participant was asked to agree or disagree with statements which described the impact of their involvement in the organization on their transition to widowhood. Those not suitable gave responses such as: "It's been so long ago I can't remember"; "It didn't have any effect because I didn't join the church until much later"; and so on. It should be noted that some of the final participants had been widowed for many years but their responses demonstrated that, from their perspective and memory, the organization they belonged to had an effect on their widowhood experience.

²Generally, the data gathered in section 6 of the interview are not presented in the results chapter. While some responses to these questions were useful, the themes which emerged in this section did not further the understanding of the way in which the two organizations had an impact on the participants' sense of control over the transition to widowhood within an organization.

³Seidman (1991) describes the relationship as an "I-Thou" relationship, a situation in which the respondent and the participant are closely connected but separate individuals. As levels of trust and disclosure develop, the relationship verges on being a "We" relationship, a situation of equality. However, it must never actually cross this boundary; if it does, the interviewer becomes equal to the participant, the interview becomes a conversation, and the distance between interviewer and participant, which allows the participant to formulate his or her own answers, is lost.

According to Seidman (1991) and the others referred to, loss of distance results in a distortion of the participant's responses; it is no longer possible to trust that the responses belong only to the participant and are not the responses of the interviewer.

⁴The comments were unsolicited; the priest and I were attending the same meeting and she recounted an interaction she had with one of the participants.

⁵For example, this particular community has a successful seniors' network through which programs and services for seniors are coordinated and advertised. Churches in this area could have a higher awareness of seniors issues, including widowhood, which might have had an impact on the perceptions of the participants in terms of the ways the church is helpful to them. If this is true, some of the comparisons noted in the results may reveal differences between the communities rather than between the church and seniors' centre.

CHAPTER III

III. RESULTS AND COMMENTARY

1. Types of Involvement

1. a. Church Involvement of Church Widows

Six of the widows from churches attend Sunday worship services; of these, two attend a midweek service as well. One attends an Anglican bi-weekly worship service at her seniors' housing project as she is unable to attend regular Sunday services due to physical limitations. All 7 participants from the church had been very involved in church life as children. Three had active roles in the church at various points across their adult life (e.g., Sunday school teachers, church treasurer, in women's auxiliaries), while 4 had only sporadic attendance before their husband died. Their husbands, in life and death, had an important effect on their church involvement. Three reported that they did not often attend church because their husband preferred not to or his work involved frequent moves. Two withdrew from more active involvement because of ill husbands needing their attention and one because her husband retired and asked her to limit her activities so they could travel. Some women identified more time during widowhood for activities as a reason for increased church involvement. During their bereavement, 3 had interactions with priests which also contributed to increased involvement.

An important type of activity for most of these women might be termed service work within the church community: for example, monthly meetings of the women's auxiliary; contributing to bazaars, teas, rummage sales and other fund raising events; work of the altar guild; and hospital visiting. As well, most of the women attend special events and special worship services, dinners and annual

vestry (business) meetings. The coffee hour after worship is an important socializing time. Two of the women attend activities which can be called faith development (e.g., Bible studies, retreats, continuing education events). One participant is active as a church representative to various regional bodies and holds a key position in her local parish. Another has held a position on the church executive for 20 years.

1. b. Seniors' Centre Involvement of Seniors' Centre Widows

All widows from seniors' centres attend at least one regular, weekly group or activity such as a wellness clinic, friendship group, exercise class, card group or craft group. All indicated that they attend special events which interest them such as movie nights, trips, special dinners, monthly birthday parties, and so on. In general, most of the activities mentioned included a strong socializing component. In addition, health and personal growth (e.g., training as a peer counsellor, information nights, educational classes) were reasons for involvement.

As would be expected (given the nature of the organization), length of membership was short compared to church membership. Five participants had belonged for less than 10 years; one for 20 years (a participant who, with her husband, had been an original member of the centre to which she belonged). Four belonged to a seniors' centre at the time of the death of their husband; however, only one husband was active in the centre. Similar to the widows from the church, husbands had a strong effect on the women's participation in seniors' centre activities. Three had limited their involvement in the centre due to a lack of interest in centre activities on the part of their husband and/or

because they were caring for their husband through illness at the end of his life. Four joined after their husband died.

One of the participants from a seniors' centre currently held a position on the executive and helped to organize and facilitate a group within the centre. Another was active as a volunteer (e.g., helping out at special events) but was not interested in leadership roles. One considered the possibility of being on a committee as she got more involved at the centre; none of the others indicated future interest in that area. Finally, one woman had been very active in leadership roles at the beginning of her involvement at the centre, but subsequently discontinued these activities.

2. Reasons for Involvement

2. a. Participant Assessment of the Importance of Their Involvement

Participants from both the churches and the seniors' centres were asked to state the importance of church or seniors' centre involvement to them. They were given four choices in decreasing order of importance. Results are presented in Table 2.

2. b. Church Involvement

Participants were given 9 possible reasons for involvement in a church. The majority of widows agreed with 7 of the suggestions, that is: (a) they enjoyed this type of social activity; (b) it was a place to meet people; (c) it helped to overcome loneliness; (d) it made them feel good to be involved and active; (e) they liked being with people of different ages; (f) it gave meaning and a focus to life; and (g) it provided them with worthwhile activities. Only one participant agreed with the statement "I've always been involved in this kind of

Table 2 - Participant assessment of the importance of their involvement

Descriptor	Church women	Seniors' Centre women
1 "It is very important to me; it is where I meet most of my friends, I enjoy the activities, and it has been a life line in difficult times. I would miss it a great deal if it were to close down or if I were unable to attend."	5	4
2 "It is important to me; many of my friends are members and I enjoy the activities. I would miss it if it were to close down or if I were unable to attend."	2	3
3 "It is somewhat important to me; some of my friends are members and generally I enjoy the activities. However, I would not miss it too much if it were closed down or I if I were unable to attend."	0	1
4 "It is not very important to me at all. I go to be with friends and do some of the activities, but I would not miss it if it were closed down."	0	0
<i>N</i>	7	8

activity", in spite of previous responses which indicated most had been involved in one way or another throughout their lives. Only two agreed that a reason for going to church was to be with peers, that is, people of the same age with shared interests.

The participants were asked an open-ended question concerning their reasons for attending church. Some responses reflected the religious nature of church activity. For example, CDD¹ stated she enjoyed worship and gained much in terms of the spiritual side of life. When questioned further she was unable to say what it was about church that kept her going back every week, other than a feeling that she had missed something if she did not attend. CGO indicated that belief in a supreme being was her reason for attending church.

This question also revealed that the social nature of church activity is important. Shared experiences and friendships are a reason for going to church. For CJN one of the most important reasons for attending church was that it helped her to overcome loneliness, "because there's other people that have the same troubles, you've got something in common with somebody else." CLE spoke on a number of occasions about various activities undertaken with friends at the church, such as lunches after worship services, bazaars and teas, and so on.

In some cases the social and the religious nature of church activity overlapped. As one participant explained:

Well, the church fits into it because it is part of it, I don't know how to explain that, you feel like you are in a house with other people, like the fellowship of the church who feel the same way as you do and you're all together in the one building, in the one place you see, and you are all working toward the same end to help one another or to help others outside, the mission fields, doing God's work as best you can...to be with each other, and enjoy their personal faith and share their personal faith and maybe acquire more faith through the fellowship with others in the church.

The participants were asked to compare their reasons for belonging to the church when they were younger with their reasons for belonging now. In the past (particularly as children), the participants felt attendance at church was the result of parental obligation (although most noted they had enjoyed the social activity associated with church). As older adults there was a sense of choice, that now church was "a serious part of life", a way to deal with the spiritual side of life. One woman stated that "when a person is young they don't think about anything happening to anyone such as losing a husband and now they realize it did happen to them and that they have to build a new life" (which for her meant becoming very active in the church). Church life had become the centre of her life once her husband died, "...for some of us, especially in the older age group, they (husband) were the light of your life, so when you don't have them you have to have something else." For two women church has always been a part of life. One stated it was "a habit", the other simply said her reasons were not different to those when she was younger because she had been brought up to go to church.

2. c. Seniors' Centre Involvement

Like the widows from the church, participants from senior's centres were read the same list of 9 possible reasons for involvement in a seniors' centre. The majority agreed with 3 of the statements: (a) they enjoyed this type of social activity; (b) it was a place to meet people; and (c) it helped overcome loneliness. All the women from the seniors' centres agreed that it made them "feel good" to be involved and active, however three qualified their responses by noting that they "were not that active or involved." In response to the statement, "I've always been involved in this kind of activity", three said yes, with two making

explicit comparisons with community groups and organizations they had belonged to at younger ages. The responses to the remaining 5 possible reasons for attending a seniors' centre were mixed; a few agreed that: (a) it gave meaning to life and a focus; (b) it provided them with worthwhile activities; and (c) they liked going to a seniors' centre to be with people of the same age who shared their interests (although they also liked to be with young people). However, two were very clear that they did not enjoy being with young people.

Some points of comparison may be made here. Participants from churches and seniors' centres responded differently to the list of possible reasons for attending. Church participants agreed with a wide range of reasons for attending church, whereas the responses of the participants from the seniors' centres clustered around activity and companionship. Another difference between the women from the seniors' centres and those from the church was that the former seemed more aware of, and concerned about, their level of involvement. For example, some made distinctions between those who went to the centre everyday and "practically lived over there" compared to their own pattern of attending once or twice a week. One was very clear that there were some women who liked to be leaders (and she was not one of them). One stated that even though the centre newsletter described many of interesting programs, they did not really appeal to her (she nevertheless attended regularly). Another called herself a "borderline hanger-on". Because there is so much activity at the two seniors' centres visited in this study, it may be that the women from the seniors' centres needed to clarify the level of activity and involvement they wanted for themselves. This particular response was not pursued during the interview, however, it may be that too much involvement

represents a loss of independence for some women, or it may be interpreted as a sign for themselves that they are too "obviously lonely".

Participants provided three reasons for belonging to a seniors' centre in response to an open-ended question. The reasons most often mentioned were "companionship" and "company" (words used by five of the participants), and the need to fill a void left by the death of their husband (in terms of both loss of activity and companionship). For example, SCJ commented:

When your husband dies, there's a void, it's like you've been chopped in half, so you have to...if you had a husband that you're happy with and together you sort of do everything more or less, and then all of a sudden he's taken, you're left suspended in the air and the next thing you do, you look into something that will fill the void, and [the seniors' centre] certainly filled that for me.

SGC answered, "I like the companionship here, I like the people and the different things they have to offer"; SHD said, "Well, it's good companionship, its some place to go, and something to do." Another reason for membership in the seniors' centre was the opportunity to take part in activities aimed at helping persons feel better about themselves (e.g., wellness group for health, gaining communication skills and confidence from self-improvement classes, learning things at the various educational programs).

The third reason for joining the seniors' centre, provided by three participants, was having membership suggested by others concerned for their wellbeing. Two women described experiences of severe depression after the death of their husbands. The doctor of one and a social worker from the local mental health association working with the other suggested to each that they join. One woman, new to the community, and widowed and recently retired, was encouraged to join by her sister who already belonged.

The request of the women to compare their reasons for joining the seniors' centre with their reasons for joining a similar type of organization when they were younger highlighted the themes, in later life, of companionship, filling a void, and self-improvement. When younger they participated in activities that were: related to the lives of their children (e.g., as scout or brownie leaders, Sunday school teachers); simply fun to do; and/or volunteer service to the community. Now they were looking for companionship; families that used to keep them busy were gone, and there was a need to find activities to take their place. Some commented that now they could do what they wanted to do, such as SFL who felt that her outlook on life had changed to the extent that she used to join things for the activity and now belonged because she saw an opportunity for self-growth. One participant joined a community centre when she was younger because it was an inexpensive way to do things and to find company; her reasons for belonging to the seniors' centre were the same.

2. d. Summary of Reasons for Involvement

Participants in both churches and seniors' centres indicated that the organization to which they belonged was very important to them as a source of activity, friendship, and support. However, there are differences in the perceptions of the widows in terms of why they attend and how the organization to which they belong acts as a resource during widowhood. Widows from the seniors' centres focused on the companionship and activities found at the seniors' centre. While these were important to the widows from the churches, they also included in their responses the recognition that the religious nature of the church was an important aspect of their involvement.

The difference between the focus on activities and companionship expressed by participants from seniors' centres and on religious activity by participants from churches, is important in terms of understanding the nature of each organization as a resource during the transition to widowhood. The widows from churches perceived their involvement in the church both similarly and differently to that of the widows from seniors' centres. Elder (1974; 1985b) suggests that regaining control during a transition is dependent upon alternatives, conditions and the structured situation in which the individual finds herself. The responses in this section are the first indication that the two organizations, as examples of structured situations in which widows place themselves, may offer some different resources during widowhood.

3. The Effect of Church or Seniors' Centre Involvement on the Transition to Widowhood

The findings reported in sections 1 and 2 above are objective responses given by the participants when asked direct questions about their involvement in either the church or the seniors' centre. In indirect ways, the participants also indicated the ways in which involvement in either a church or seniors' centre affected or was linked to the transition to widowhood. Themes which demonstrated the ways in which involvement in either the seniors' centre or the church affected or was linked to the transition to widowhood were determined through an analysis of the interviews. (See Chapter II, section 7 for an overview of the themes.) For presentation in this chapter, the themes have been arranged according to three broad categories. First is a section in which the focus is the way in which churches and seniors' centres were utilized by the participants in order to help them regain control over their life course in response to the

general impact of widowhood. Second, is a section in which regaining control over the life course is able to happen as a result of the nature of each of the two organizations as supportive resources. The third section includes the ways in which the organizations played a role in the processes of restructuring undertaken by the participants.

3. a. Utilization of Church and Seniors' Centre in Response to the Impact of Widowhood

The widows in this study experienced widowhood in ways similar to those described in other research (e.g., Matthews, 1991; Barrett, 1977; and Perlmutter & Hall, 1987). Explored in this section are the ways in which the church and seniors' centres were utilized by the participants in response to the impact of widowhood and in order to regain control over the life course.

Involvement in either a church or a seniors' centre seemed to be of help in two particular ways: it helped the widows deal with loneliness; and it provided ways to respond to the initial feelings of shock and numbness and subsequent feelings of needing to "get on with life."

Involvement in a church or seniors' centre was helpful in the response to loneliness. Activities in either organization served to keep the widows' minds off the loss which was causing their loneliness.

Q- Let's put it another way. Thinking about yourself in a church setting, would you see that as a place where you might talk about widowhood?

CNO- Well, I could, but then the thing is that with the groups that I'm in they don't, we try not to dwell on it all the time, it's like dwelling on a sickness, you try to get your mind off the fact that you're a widow. It's not good to dwell, it's not healthy to dwell on the fact that you're a widow all the time, it's not a healthy aspect whatsoever.

Involvement provided a diversion.

Q- One of the things you said earlier was that the hardest thing about being a widow is isolation - is that the word?

SGR- Well, it's the loneliness really.

Q- Okay, has the seniors' centre been a place where you've been able to understand that or cope with that feeling?

SGR- Yes, I would think so. When I go I feel, sort of one of the people there that I, at the time I feel fine. When I'm there I don't think about being lonely or anything like that.

Q- So while you're there it's a bit of a distraction?

SGR- Oh yes, that right.

In response to the statement, "The seniors' centre is a place where I feel free to mourn the loss of my husband" two participants commented:

SCJ- No, I don't even think about my husband much when I'm at the centre.

SHD- Um, I don't know, I don't think I look at it that way. I think it's a place to lift you up out of the mourning situation.

The goal for many widows was to keep busy in order to take their mind off the loneliness:

Q- My involvement in [the seniors' centre] gave me a sense of well being, that life would be okay even though I had lost my husband.

SGC- I think so, because I mean...that was another...we had struts...some...All sorts of things shortly after he died and they kept saying, "you're going to be at the strut, you're going to be here, you're going to be there." And I know this is what they were doing, they were trying to keep me so busy I didn't have time to think of myself...

In addition, church and seniors' centre activity provided another way to protect against loneliness - being with other people rather than spending time alone. In the following interaction, CJN does not respond to the question asked of her, but she does express a common sentiment among the participants:

Q- How about the women in the auxiliary - is that another place where you can talk [about widowhood]?

CJN- Oh yes. There's the married women and there's the widows. We rarely discuss this, it's really when you are in the house by yourself that you are really lonely. When you're out you are in the company, and you forget about yourself.

Participants from both the church and the seniors' centre revealed that eventually their response to widowhood included a need to "get on with life." A number of widows indicated they were not ready to have their lives end because their husband had died. The task was to find ways to continue in spite of the loss; both church and seniors' centre provided means to that end.

Attending an activity was something to look forward to, something that could be counted on to fill the time when there was too much time alone. Events became occasions, something that made going on worthwhile. As one participant put it:

I think I enjoyed the part about getting ready and going to church, and it made it an occasion for me; gave me a reason to buy a new coat or keep myself respectable, not let myself go.

The fear of not being able to keep going was voiced by a number of widows in both the church and the seniors' centres. One wondered:

Well, there are times when, without the church....where I would have been...not in dire circumstances because I would have my income, but mentally I think things would have been very bad. Certainly when you are left on your own, I think you sort of gravitate to something to go on with your life.

Church and seniors' centre activities provide a regular structure around which to organize life, which may protect against simply giving up:

CGO- ...One thing about keeping busy all the time is - How does a person my age keep busy unless you make plans? Like right now I'm going with a friend to a morning exercise class once a week. Well, why should a person my age want to do that? But it gets me up in the morning, it has a reason. If you don't have a reason to get up you won't get up, even young people have that problem. And another morning we go down to art class, well, I haven't got any more art in me...

Q- Discovering new talents?

CGO- No, I'm not another Mother Moses, or Grandma Moses I should say, but it gets me up. So that's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday I have to be up and out of the house by 9 o'clock. I have another friend whose been a widow much longer than I have, and she coped very well, but suddenly something happened to her and she stays in bed all day and then she doesn't sleep all night, and that's why the next day she's in bed all day. And she was such a wonderful smart woman, she worked for years and years in an accountant's office and she suddenly...something happened.

Another church widow, based on her observation of other widows, suggested that church involvement might help to keep a widow who was lonely from turning to alcohol or sleeping pills. The intensity with which SKX outlined her schedule of events at both a seniors' centre and a church, suggested that the activities were something to hang onto, something that helped her get through each week. Involvement is therefore not only for the purpose of filling time and dealing with loneliness, but something that some widows use to ensure that they will be able to "get on with life".

As presented in this section, the participants described ways in which involvement in their organization helped them respond to some of the feelings associated with widowhood. However, the number of times this type of response was given by participants from the seniors' centres was much greater than that of widows from churches. Church women tended to refer to the priest or other widows as sources of help, rather than that the church provided activities to help them forget their loneliness. Sometimes the women from the church would agree with a statement that suggested the church helped them in some way, but when probed they seemed unable to identify exactly what it was about the church that helped. Two widows from the church stated that their involvement in the church had nothing to do with their widowhood, (although both, throughout their interviews, indicated a number of ways in which the church had been helpful to them). Overall, activity in the church appeared to be

helpful to the widows, but they did not readily identify the ways in which it was. By comparison, widows from the seniors' centres were able to identify the ways in which their involvement had helped them to deal with widowhood (in many cases simply keeping active was cited as the most important feature of their membership in the centre).

Thomas (see notes 2 and 5, Chapter 1) suggests that one aspect of control over a situation is the need to be attentive to the situation, that is, to take note of what is happening and to make judgements and undertake actions in order to more successfully control or manipulate our world. Four of the widows might be characterized as "attentive", that is, they are aware of their feelings associated with widowhood and in response have utilized resources in their organizations (e.g., gestalt therapy group) in a conscious way, to reconstruct their life courses. However, many of the widows saw their involvement as a way to forget some of the feelings associated with widowhood. The choice to be involved in an organization such as a church or seniors' centre may actually have enabled them to relinquish the need to be constantly attentive during the process of regaining control over their life course. The two organizations provided options for widows which did not demand that they be continually problem solving and aware of their situation, which is what they desired since the emotions associated with widowhood were painful. Activities associated with the organizations provide relief from feeling the strong emotions that come with bereavement, that is, provide a diversion.

Other results of this study demonstrate the ways in which people act consciously during transitions such as widowhood in order to regain control over the life course, and the features of organizations which enable this process

(e.g., as discussed in section 3. a). It is important to recognize that woven into transitions are a variety of emotions, including some very painful ones. Sometimes a desire to forget what has happened accompanies the transition. The paradox which the data in this section suggest is that within the context of the structures of social organizations, it is possible to regain control over the life course without always being involved in a process of attentive, rational problem solving activity.

3. b. Church and Seniors' Centre as Supportive Resources

In this section, the ways in which churches and seniors' centres were utilized by the participants as supportive resources toward regaining control over the life course, are considered. Both organizations offered structural features which assisted the women as they made the transition to widowhood.

3. b. (i) A Sense of Belonging

Women from both organizations conveyed the feeling that they "belonged", that they were "welcome", and that they had "a place" in the organization with which they were affiliated. However, they expressed it using different language. The most common metaphor for the feeling of belonging in the church was that of "family". The church as "the family of God" is a fairly common phrase in church life, so the use of the metaphor is not surprising. The concept of family was used in conjunction with references to: being close knit; aware of each other's troubles; providing guidance to others; knowing that somebody else cares; and a sense of familiarity with others. One widow, pushing the metaphor further, noted that members of the church were like

brothers and sisters (and wondered why, since we call male priests father, we did not call female priests mother).

The women from the seniors' centres did not use one particular descriptor to convey their sense of belonging. Instead they referred to the ways in which they felt welcome by others at the centre. SKX saw the leaders of her group as "very friendly and they make you feel at home when you go in". One widow felt she was "taken in with open arms", and two women commented on the greeters at the main door who enhanced the feeling of being welcomed. The sense of belonging was expressed also in terms of having a unique place in the centre. SFL, the peer counsellor, expressed joy in knowing she was appreciated for her work; SCJ said:

I realize that when I came here, different people have told me that I have a part right here. I have a happy face and I say hello to everybody and apparently this is what they tell me, and I don't offend anybody and so I, well, I'm having the time of my life!

One widow from a seniors' centre alluded to the idea of family as she described increasing involvement in the centre over the period of time of her widowhood. For this woman widowhood marked the loss of family life, as well as the loss of her social life which had been linked to her husband. She reflected on the last family gathering held in her home. Without her husband, the "head of the family", she indicated that a focal point for family gatherings was gone. When asked whether or not the seniors' centre helped her to overcome the loneliness and the void which she had described as her experience of widowhood, she said, "Yes, 'cause you see, that's what your loneliness is, is the void, you don't belong to anything, you haven't got a home anymore to, so to speak, no family."

The potential for adaptation - the ability of the individual to respond to a situation and make choices in order to regain control - is influenced by the extent to which the environment provides support for adaptive responses (Elder, 1974). The sense of belonging expressed by the participants in this study may be one element of a "supportive environment". Environments can provide other, sometimes more concrete, forms of support (see the following section for a discussion of the ways in which other widows are described as supportive). However, it may be that the study of transitions and the factors which enable individuals to regain control after an event such as widowhood, needs to include an awareness of less tangible elements of the environment, such as the sense of belonging.

3. b. (ii) The Presence of Other Widows

Participants identified the presence of other widows in their organizations as helpful to them. Widows from both churches and seniors' centres identified other widows as those who have shared a similar experience, and indicated a comfort in knowing that there are others who "have come through the same thing":

Q- Is [the seniors' centre] one of the things that in some way or another kept you on an even keel [after your husband died]?
SHD- Yes, I think it does because you're mixing with women who have come through the same thing, they're in the same age category a lot of them, and I think it makes you feel that you are a part of something.

Widows also are expected to have some understanding of each other's experiences and feelings:

Q-[Do you agree?:] Knowledge about the transition to widowhood and issues of importance to grieving people are well known and easily talked about at the seniors' centre.

SCJ- Oh, I think so. You run into them [widows] all over the place, you see.

Q- Can you think of an incident?

SCJ- I can't think of it now, but it comes up from time to time. It's a sort of an understanding; if you're a widow you understand other widows. And if you've got something on your mind, there's always somebody will come. Or something that's concerning you, you just have to open your mouth a little bit and explain, somebody can jump in and tell you. Oh, I've experienced that and that helps.

The presence of other widows ultimately provides the opportunity to share experiences associated with widowhood. A closer look at the ways widows share their experience with other widows, is presented in a separate section (see Section 3. b. (iii)).

Widows who belonged to seniors' centres described a second way in which the presence of other widows was helpful. Other widows provide a comparison group, a way of measuring one's own ability to cope with widowhood. (It is noteworthy that none of the widows from churches made this comparison). The following interaction provides an example:

Q- [Do you agree?:] My involvement in the seniors' centre has helped me overcome the fears I had about being a widow.

SGR- Yes, I would agree with that.

Q- Can you identify how it was helpful?

SGR- Well, it helps in as much as you know you're not the only one that this has happened to, and, ah, you meet some people there devastated, they never get over it. And then it makes you sort of stop and think, you think well, I'm pretty lucky that I can handle it the way I can.

Observing others who seem to be coping also can act as a form of encouragement. According to SGC:

I think, well, if they can cope, so can I, and they're getting along well and they're doing things, so if they can do it so can I, so what am I feeling self-pity for?

The comparison between one's self and others can lead also to the conclusion that one is not coping well, a problem for one widow. SKX, who had described a fairly difficult bereavement process, was aware of the many other

widows at the seniors' centre, but worried that they seemed to cope much better than she. She felt that the message from friends who belonged to the centre, and also a peer counsellor from the centre who had visited her, was that she was not the only widow and she was not alone in her grief. Her interpretation of the message was that she should "pull herself together". Interestingly, another participant from the centre, SGC, said that she had no sympathy for anyone (including widows) who felt lonely since the centre provided so much activity and the opportunity to forget your troubles. The feeling of belonging and of common understanding has some limits. Two other participants noted that speaking too much about the feelings associated with widowhood might lead to one running the risk of being thought a "pain to others".

Finally, an interesting difference between the widows from the seniors' centre and those from the church was that the former were aware of the predominance of widows as a group within the seniors' centre. All of the women in the seniors' centres, on a number of occasions, indicated that the very presence of so many other widows helped explain why the seniors' centre was a comfortable and helpful place for them to be as widows. Two of the women from the churches mentioned that their church communities had many widows and the rest mentioned other widows as individual sources of support. However, they did not indicate that the experience of being in a context of many widows explained why the church was helpful for them as widows. For the women in the seniors' centre, the number of other widows in and of itself was an important feature, one apparently not experienced in the same way by the church women.

According to Elder (1974), transitions should not be understood as events in which the individual's life becomes completely chaotic. People generally are not in the position of attempting to create a new life out of nothing. The trajectories of individuals are embedded within society, therefore:

Responses to life change and the loss of personal control entail choices among structured options, and this structure is one way a social institution shapes the life course.

(Elder, 1985b; p. 44)

People undergoing a life course transition are faced with a number of options or possible pathways; the choice of pathway depends on a variety of factors (Elder, 1985b). For widows in seniors' centres, one aspect of the loss and regaining of control is the presence of other widows, not only as people with whom they feel a common bond, but as a comparison group. Other widows, and specifically the ways in which they are perceived to negotiate the transition to widowhood, provide a social setting in which widows see the options for their own life course. In addition, not only does the presence of other widows in seniors' centres provide options, it may also create a context which encourages widows to pay "attention" to the options available to them (see section 3. a). Widows from seniors' centres may be more conscious of their actions toward gaining control because the context provides reminders of their status of widow. The same effect would not be expected to the same degree in a church setting with a variety of ages and in which one particular group does not dominate numerically.

Widows from both the church and seniors' centre noted that the presence of other widows created a feeling of comfort, based on the assumption of shared experience. As will be discussed in section 3. b. (iii), other widows are a resource in terms of concrete support. To some extent they provide

opportunities to talk about the loss, but the level of interaction is not "deep". Here the feelings of comfort are not based on concrete actions, but are the result of the presence of others in the setting. For widows from both organizations, the comfort that comes from realizing that one is not alone in the experience of loss may increase sense of belonging. This may be another example of what widows in transition perceive as a "supportive environment".

3. b. (iii) Sharing the Experience of Widowhood

The widows in this study described a variety of ways in which they shared their experience of widowhood with others in their organization. Three widows from churches and one from a seniors' centre saw their respective involvements as a context within which they might intentionally work through feelings of grief. The others indicated they were most comfortable with the topic of widowhood when it occurred in the course of conversation; they were not interested in groups or structured events which delved into the topic at a deeper level.

Four of the participants (three from churches, one from a seniors' centre) described situations in which they consciously worked at coming to terms with the death of their husband. In all four cases the widows involved themselves in a setting which had the purpose of providing an opportunity to formally discuss concerns. In one case a widow, who had been a sporadic church goer, joined a gestalt therapy group organized by an Anglican priest and supported by the parish. A priest recommended to a second widow that she attend a grief recovery group which met in the church and had informal connections with the church. Another, a regular attender at a weekly Bible study, recounted that sometimes the discussion related to death and dying, although she chose to

listen rather than speak about her widowhood in that setting. The fourth widow, as a person training to become a peer counsellor in a seniors' centre, related that as part of the program she found that her feelings of grief often surfaced and were responded to by the other trainees or the instructors.

In the above cases, the interaction and discussion of widowhood occurred in a structured setting which had the purpose of helping people learn to cope with loss (among other things). Most of the other participants did not consider seeking formalized interactions or groups. Church women generally did not know of grief recovery or other types of groups in their parish. One, who was aware of a grief recovery group, did not attend because she felt her family provided her with that kind of support. The seven remaining widows from seniors' centres were aware of widow support groups or peer counsellors in their centre. Little personal interest was shown for any of the programs, but most thought they were useful programs for others.

Q- Have you ever talked to a peer counsellor?

SHD- No, I never have, but I know that they do have that over there and I think that that is a wonderful thing, you know, because I imagine there are widows [who] need that.

None of the church or seniors' centre participants described informal settings which might suggest that other members of the church or seniors' centre acted as confidants² during their bereavement (although, in some cases priests took the role of confidant, see Section 3. b. (iv)). In fact, most of the women were clear that they did not see the church or the seniors' centre as places where they wanted to be too open about their feelings. Church and seniors' centre were seen as places to forget problems; they provided a distraction from the feelings of loneliness and loss, rather than a place to be reminded of widowhood.

While the widows in this study did not describe other widows in their organization as confidants, it is not the case that the experience of widowhood was completely avoided. While conversations cannot be characterized as "deep", belonging to a church or seniors' centre did provide some widows with the opportunity to have their loss acknowledged and to talk informally about it. Following are some examples, from both the seniors' centre participants and the church participants, of the kinds of interactions which demonstrate the way in which these women shared their experiences with others: giving and receiving advice concerning widowhood (one participant strongly encouraged another widow in her church to take a holiday); help with practical things (such as providing baking, giving each other a ride to church); knowing that someone else cares (a pat on the hand as one sits weeping in church); giving and receiving cards and flowers (and yet not speaking a word about the death after returning to the seniors' centre); sometimes querying feelings ("were you angry at the start?"); and talking about their dead husband in the natural course of a conversation ("some little incident comes up and you say, 'Oh, my husband and I used to do this'").

Social settings provide options for different types of behaviours in response to an event such as widowhood. The individual interacts with her setting and the options available to her; the variety of interactions may result in different possible ways of reconstructing life organization (Elder, 1974). One possible option as demonstrated in the data from this study is that of the opportunity to talk about or share the experiences faced during the life course transition of widowhood. However, the option to share one's experience must

be understood as a continuum of greater or lesser intensity rather than as an either/or situation.

Churches and seniors' centres provided a number of possible settings within which widows might share their experience of widowhood. Groups of various kinds (gestalt therapy, bereavement, Bible studies and peer counsellor training) gave some widows the opportunity to explore a crisis in their life in order to find the meaning of bereavement or come to a new self-understanding. This kind of "sharing the experience" fits well with Thomas' suggestion that an aspect of control over a crisis situation is to be attentive to what is happening and to thus develop new and unique ways to respond to the situation. Other participants were most comfortable with informal situations in which their loss was acknowledged but did not demand extensive self-reflection. They nevertheless found these interactions useful in terms of making the transition to widowhood. In this sense both organizations provide the option of a less intense level of attentiveness to the crisis. The option of "sharing the experience" must be understood as a continuum of possible levels of self-disclosure and self-reflection, rather than simply as a situation in which the widows shared or did not share their experience.

3. b. (iv) The Role of Professionals

A striking difference between the women from churches and the women from seniors' centres was the role played by professional people within the organizations. More specifically, one of the most important sources of support for widows who belonged to churches was the parish priest. Widows from the seniors' centres made positive comments about staff people (e.g., "they seem to care about people", "they make you feel welcome"); however, they were few in

number, and did not display the richness of detail associated with comments about priests. In this section, the ways in which priests assisted the participants in bereavement are presented.

Before describing the role of the priest, it is interesting to note the salience of the priest in the participants' references to him or her. Prior to being asked specific questions about the priest, four of the seven church participants referred to some way that the priest had helped them. One woman from a seniors' centre, in response to an open ended question at the beginning of the interview about who had been most helpful when first widowed, answered "my family" and "my minister". Another from a seniors' centre, when asked to respond to the statement, "I have received information [from the seniors' centre] which helps me to understand the process of bereavement" responded "No, I didn't come to do that, they have but I...the minister helped me more, the minister helped." There were no comparable responses concerning staff at the seniors' centres; that is, no widows spontaneously referred to a staff person as having been especially helpful.

Another example of the central role of the priest is demonstrated in the following interview segments with three widows from the churches. In each case, when asked to think about the church, the widow referred to the priest:

Q- [Do you agree?] My involvement in the church gave me a sense of wellbeing, that life would be okay even though I had lost my husband.

CDD- Yes, definitely.

Q- How did that come across?

CDD- Well, I know Reverend L said to me one time, I had really done a lot of nursing those last ten years, and he said, "maybe this will be something you would like to help voluntarily after because you've had so much experience."

Q- And did it help you when you were first widowed, did being in the church help you to cope with your feelings?

CLE- Oh yes.

Q- Would that be a strong agreement, or it sort of helped?

CLE- Put it as a 4 [on the rating scale], 'cause we did change ministers, yes my husband was still alive when we had the other minister, which passed away.

Q- [Do you agree?] My involvement in the church had little impact on the way I coped with becoming a widow.

CJN- Well, it helps in some ways, I know our minister was very good.

Participants from seniors' centres did not refer to individual staff or professionals in the centre in this way, nor did they identify staff as being representative of the way in which the centre was helpful to them. Given the same questions or statements, widows in seniors' centres were more likely to say that the centre helped because the activity kept their minds off their loneliness, it provided companionship, or the centre was helpful because there were so many other widows who had shared their experience.

The priest was described by the widows (both those recruited from churches and those from seniors' centres who also were members of a church) as being helpful to them in three ways. First, the priest was someone who responded to their grief with compassion and understanding. Second, the priest was a public figure who revealed that he or she had also suffered and who therefore shares a special bond with the widow. And third, the priest was someone who helped them to "come to terms" with the new identity of widow.

In the view of all but one of the widows who talked about a clergyperson in their interview, the priest was someone who was a source of comfort, kindness and caring. According to one widow, the nature of the role of the priest is to provide comfort; the priest knows the right things to say. For two widows, the "right thing" was reassurance that their husbands had gone to a better place and they would one day join him. For another it was the appropriate Bible passage used at her husband's funeral. One woman found it helpful that the

priest commented on how well she was doing since the death of her husband. One priest advised a widow to let out her grief, something she now counselled others to do. To these women, the priest was a friend, someone who was willing to listen to problems.

One possible explanation for the positive attitude toward priests, as demonstrated in this sample, is that the women from the churches were ones handpicked by the priests themselves. One suspects that they were likely to be women with whom the priest had spent time discussing widowhood and someone he or she would feel comfortable recommending. However, comments about priests and ministers by participants from seniors' centres who also belonged to churches, were positive as well. Only one widow in the study, SGR, a participant recruited at a seniors' centre, suggested that priests should not be considered special. She commented:

I like going to church, but I don't feel that church in itself...because... I feel like a minister...sometimes I have a feeling they don't know better than I do. They're telling me?...so, and I....like everyone else they speak in generalities when you're an individual.

In hindsight it might have been fruitful to pursue the experiences that informed SGR's perception of the minister. However, other than SGR, the widows from seniors' centres who had not been recruited by priests, said the same things about their clergyperson with the same tone of positive appreciation, as the widows recruited from churches.

The second way in which the priest had an effect on the lives of widows came at times when he or she revealed his or her own experiences of suffering. During the course of four interviews, widows told of incidents in which they had been affected by the priest telling of his (male priests in all cases) own personal losses. Two participants referred to sermons in which the priest had talked

about his own trials, one having lost his father, the other going through a marital separation. An example comes from the interview with CDD:

Q- Were there any ways that your involvement in church gave you the sense that you could keep responding to life, to the demands of life, even though you were sad?

CDD- Yep.

Q- How did that come up?

CDD- I guess probably from some of the lessons and sermons I heard. I talked to one of the other ministers one day that he was giving a talk. Rev L. was away. And I said, "Gosh, I really enjoyed where you were coming from, what you were saying today, because," I said, "I remember when my J died, the first month or two I really didn't want even to go to church. Something that I had loved had been taken." And he said, he's a minister, and he said he felt the same way, "When my father died, for awhile, they've taken something." Once you realize that's what it is, it's different.

Q- So is this one of the feelings that happened, somehow something had been taken from you by God?

CDD- Yep, that's what I thought at first, then I reasoned that it wasn't, that this is the way it had to be, and that I'd be with J again. And then I could accept it.

Two widows related experiences in which they and the priest "bared their hearts" to each other (a phrase used by SCJ). CLE had been upset and angry that no one had told her the extent of her husband's illness. After he died, she returned to the hospital and sought out the chaplain to discuss the situation:

Well, when finally I told him what I wanted to say, and he listened to me very quietly, and then he said, "Mrs. E." (he was like 57), he says, "Mrs. E. I know just what you're going through," he says, "I know just what you're going through." He said that twice. He said, "I lost my wife with a brain tumour, cancerous brain tumour six months ago, and" he says, "and I'm still in the same position as you are," he said, "and so," he said, "I know just what you're feeling." Well, then I felt so sorry for him and I thought, "isn't that sad," 'cause he had a very nice wife and I just felt so bad about that.

It is impossible to convey the way in which this statement comes across on the tape of the interview, other than to say that CLE's voice and tone indicated that

she felt special, perhaps even flattered, to have shared this special moment with the chaplain.

SCJ, a widow recruited from a seniors' centre, describes a similar experience with her minister:

Q- During the period of time when you were really depending on your family, and the depression was just starting, where was the church in all of that?

SCJ- The church, for some reason, it's going its own way, being if you are a happy person and could put on a smile, no matter what they feel. "Oh she's doing all right." But I did... the minister did when I told him. He was very helpful, he had been through somewhat of a depression himself. He had lost his wife and he had a daughter that gave him a great deal of trouble, you know, imagine a minister's daughter into dope, you see. And he'd had this to bear, he had crosses to bear. And he came one time to me when he knew I wasn't well. And I was only two blocks from the church, so I used to say, he was always calling in to surprise me. "If you... well..., if you'd like you can come and have a bite of lunch." And so he said, "Well I have some of my lunch." And so I said, "Come on over and I'll make you a cup of tea." And he came, and it was a nice afternoon, and he sat on the balcony at my apartment. And I can remember the two of us bared our hearts to each other, and that made him... he wanted to let me realize that I wasn't the only one, and that I wasn't of course, I was able to pour out my heart to him and we understood one another quite well after that, and he helped me. But he left the church soon after that. He was a... he got off on the wrong foot at the church. And I was very sorry about that because they didn't see the man, they could only see the shell of the man, his outside.

In all four examples, there was clearly a sense that the personal suffering recounted by the clergy was a meaningful event for the participants, special enough for the incident to be remembered in considerable detail. None of the participants in either organization related similar interactions with other people with the same level of detail (or emotion in the case of SCJ and CLE).

Priests were described as helpful in a third way during widowhood. They helped widows adapt to their new identity as widows. This aspect was described by three participants from churches, who, in all three cases, said they

had found it difficult to accept the fact that they were now widows rather than wives. CRJ's husband died unexpectedly at a young age, from the effects of smoking. CNO's husband was an alcoholic whom she describes as having committed a slow suicide. Both women had felt anger at their husbands and expressed regrets that they would not grow old together. And both identified the priest as someone with whom they could discuss their anger in order to arrive at some resolution. CRJ was particularly articulate. Her interactions with the priest who ran her gestalt therapy group lead to the realization that, at 61, she still had a life to live. With his help she came to see widowhood as an opportunity to find the person who had been left behind when she had married as a young woman. The story of CDD is slightly different. Although her husband had been very ill for many years, she had never considered the possibility that she would be a widow; she thought they would die together. Coming to terms with herself as a widow was partially facilitated by her interactions with the priest. She credits him with helping her to realize that her husband had been suffering, it was "right" that it had ended and that he was now "in a better place", and eventually she will be with him again. In the interim, she is a widow. In all three cases, the participants identified a priest as part of the process of resolving difficulties surrounding their new identity as widow.

As noted at the beginning of this section, comments about staff and other professionals from participants recruited in the seniors' centres were not as numerous, nor as detailed. There was no one person or staff position identified as comparable to the priest. In fact, SCJ was asked if there was anyone like the priest at the centre she attended and she simply answered "no". Most widows from seniors' centres appeared to have little, if any, regular and direct contact with staff. The only person who described a significant interaction with a staff

person was SFL who had trained to become a peer counsellor and was active on the elected executive of her centre. She recounted one incident in which she had a spontaneous conversation with a staff person about her widowhood. Her description of the conversation suggested that it was not something she would normally expect to occur.

Three widows described interactions with other members (that is, not staff) at their seniors' centre in ways that echoed some of the comments made about priests. In all cases, the other members had leadership roles in the centre. For two widows, a woman named TT held a special place. TT had asked one widow to be her special assistant in a craft group, a point related with some pride by the widow chosen. TT was described as a "shining light" by another widow. This widow had met TT on the street and had told her she was having problems adjusting to her husband's death. TT responded that she also had her ups and downs, then suggested she join a craft group at the centre with other women the same age. A widow from another centre described her chance encounters (while shopping) with the woman who coordinated the group she attended at the centre. DP was described as a warm person who responded with care and concern. At the centre DP made this widow feel welcome and comfortable when she attended events. TT and DP demonstrated that they, as high-profile figures in the life of the centre, cared and made the widows feel special in their interactions with them.

Thomas considered religious institutions as an aspect of culture which provided definitions and solutions to crisis situations. "Codes, rules, precepts, policies, traditions and standardized social relations" (Volkart, 1951; p. 7) are products of culture, external to individuals, but that nevertheless exert control

over individuals as they are incorporated into people's understanding of their situation and their ways of dealing with crises. Religious systems (as well as other aspects of culture such as language, logical analysis, abstraction, magic and science) are a development of society in response to times when there is a need to regain control over the life structure. Special occupations such as the priest (also medicine man, lawgivers, judges, rulers, physicians, and so on) are created so that society has specialists who can claim skills in assisting with crises. Death is an example of a time when the habits of everyday life are disrupted, and a basic restructuring of life organization must occur. The data described in this section suggest that religion, through the priest, is a resource for some widows. Some of the ways in which the priest may have acted as a resource are explored in the following paragraphs.

To begin, Thomas' formulation of the role of religion suggests a functionalist perspective. Nevertheless, the women in this study who described their interactions with a priest support this general picture of the role of religion and the role of the priest. The priest is a skilled comforter, someone who is expected to know what to do because of his or her role in the church. The priest is viewed as an authority on matters of life and death, and most important, the afterlife. In his or her role, the priest communicates the traditions of the church concerning matters of death; the priest provides solutions to the problem of meaning. Since the women recruited from churches had long histories with the church (although not necessarily in the form of continuous contact), it is likely that the traditions brought to bear on the situation were ones already accepted by them. To regain control over the life course, these widows used religious traditions through the person of the priest.

Not everyone ascribes authority to the role of the priest. SGR felt that the priest spoke only in generalities and was not more knowledgeable than anyone else. Even though SGR attended church, she appears to be a skeptic for whom the message and tradition of the church were not given authority and, therefore, did not assist her in her attempt to make sense of the situation. This suggests a possible explanation for the lack of identification of seniors' centre staff as people who were helpful in dealing with widowhood. Like priests for some people, they may not be seen as people with particular authority in the area of death and widowhood.

The responses of the widows who accept the function of the priest suggest that it is not purely the "role" of the priest which has an effect, that is, it was not only the priest in the role of communicator of church tradition on matters of life and death which had an effect. The participants were especially aware of the priest as a person sharing his or her own experiences and the resources of religious tradition which had been useful to him or her. A distinction could be made between priest as role bearer and priest as co-sufferer. For some participants it may be that the priest is a powerful model of how religious meaning and faith might be brought to bear on a crisis.³

Another explanation for the impact of the priest is that the priest, as a high-profile and important person in the community, conveys the message to the participant that she is also important because they have something in common. Not only has the priest had a similar experience, he or she is willing to discuss it with them. This would help explain the impact of TT and DP, who were leaders within their respective seniors' centre communities. They might also be seen as important people and their interactions with the participants caused them to feel important too. It is not simply a case of knowing that suffering is

shared by others (a resource some widows found in other widows), but that it is shared by others who are special because of their high profile or importance within the community, which seems to have been helpful to these participants.⁴

3. c. The Role of Church and Seniors' Centres in the Process of Restructuring the Life Course During the Transition to Widowhood

This final section presents findings which describe the ways in which the church and seniors' centre play a part in the process of restructuring the life course. While the two organizations are still understood to be supportive resources in this section, the emphasis is on the ways in which they became part of the activity of the women as they made the transition to widowhood.

3. c. (i) Continuity and Familiarity versus a New Venture

The participants can be divided into four groups on the basis of the organization to which they belong and the timing of their involvement. (See Table 3 for a schematic presentation of the following information.) Group 1 ($N = 3$) is widows from the church who were active in the church before their husbands died and continued in the church as widows. Group 2 ($N = 4$) is widows from seniors' centres who were active in a seniors' centre before their husbands died and who continued as widows. These two groups are expected to be similar in the way they describe the impact of their respective involvements on their experience of widowhood. Group 3 ($N = 4$) is widows who had had sporadic involvement in the church, were not active at the time of the death of their husband, but who became active after. Group ($N = 4$) is participants from the seniors' centres who joined the centre for the first time after

Table 3 - Membership of widows in either church and seniors' centre according to length of involvement.

	<u>Organization</u>	
	<u>Church</u>	<u>Seniors' Centre</u>
Long-term Involvement (before death of husband)	Group 1 (N = 3)	Group 2 (N = 4)
Short-term Involvement (since death of husband)	Group 3 (N = 4)	Group 4 (N = 4)

their husband's death. It might be expected that these latter two groups would demonstrate some similarities in their experiences since both underwent a change in organizational activity. In the following discussion, the similarities and differences among these four groupings of the participants are described.

Widows in Group 1 perceived continuity with the church as an important part of coming to terms with bereavement. For CLE the church had been a part of some important celebrations in her life (e.g., 50th wedding anniversary party). It was also a constant factor in her life at the time of widowhood:

Q- I'm just wondering, is there anything about the church especially that's helpful to you, in...once you were a widow, or anyway in which the church is helpful to you?

CLE- Well, I think you don't just interrupt your life just because you're a widow. You just continue. You don't give up everything just because you've lost a husband.

Q- And did the church help you with that?

CLE- Oh yes, there was always something to do around the church, and I was so busy in it before and now, though I did retire from some of the jobs, but I didn't take a top spotlight as president or secretary, I was just one of the girls in the auxiliary or church group, that's, we call ourselves the girls and with my friends it was just the same.

Another long-time church member explained it as follows:

Q- [Do you agree?:] My involvement in the church gave me a sense of wellbeing, that life would be okay even though I had lost my husband.

CGO- umhmm (a positive response)

Q- Is there any special event or incident that you can remember that helped with that?

CGO- (long pause)

Q- How about with the idea that life would be okay?

CGO- It was a continuation, a part of my life even though a part had gone. There was still a continuation in the church, of my involvement and the people that I cared about and cared about me. That continued. And with family too, my children. That didn't die.

All widows in Group 1 said that their level of activity increased once their husband died, which they attributed to no longer needing to respond to their

husband's needs or wishes. It should be noted that three participants from seniors' centres were also long-time church members, active at the time of the death of their husband. During the interview, they were asked to comment on their church involvement as well as their seniors' centre involvement. Like the participants from the church, the church represented continuity and familiarity for these women - long-term friendships and involvements were helpful during the course of their bereavement.

The experience of Group 2 is similar to the experience of the widows in Group 1. They also increased their involvement after their husbands had died. They described the centre as a source of support because of continuity of friendships and activity. In ways similar to the church participants, continuous and familiar involvement proved helpful in responding to their loss. For example, one participant (a founding member of her centre) responded in the following way:

Q- The next section is questions about when you were widowed; that experience of being widowed. And the first one is to think back to that time 13 years ago. What were some of your immediate feelings, the feelings that happened when your husband died?

SHX- Well, nothing much different, I mean to say I just kept going down there [the seniors' centre], maybe about a week after when things quietened down, the girls used to come up here you know. But, uh, no it didn't make very much difference, well of course he'd been retired for maybe 10 years and we didn't do very much because we didn't have that much money.

Q- I'm thinking in terms of things like, some people talk about suddenly they were really lonely or...

SHX- No, I wasn't, well lonely, yes, when he's gone. We were real compatible together. Most of the people that are left down there all knew him practically, because we both were down there. So it was a shock to a lot of them down there too, because he just died in his sleep.

A comparison of the widows in Groups 3 and 4, reveals differences in their new involvement. The involvement of Group 3 (who basically "rejoined" the church), was characterized by a return to something familiar. Rather than being a new venture, it was as if the church had always been a part of their lives, even though some had not been in church for many years. They did not refer to the challenge of breaking into a new social group, even though they were joining congregations new to them. In addition, these widows rarely spoke of their return as a conscious decision, the result of identifying the church as a place to rebuild their lives. More often, they described the church as a comforting place, and a good place to put one's energies and spend one's time as a widow. As one participant expressed it:

I was grown up to go to church and I think that if you are brought up to go to church you will eventually go back to it, because for many years, as I say, I didn't go to church. But when we were children we were brought up to go to Sunday School and my mother went to church and when we got older we went to church with her, and I think that if you have a background like that it's something you can fall back on.

The members of Group 4 described their involvement differently. Joining the centre after their husband died represented a new venture in their lives; the decision to join the centre reflected a direct response to widowhood. Some stated that they wanted to make a new life for themselves, or felt a need to break into a new social setting. SCJ joined looking for new activities in response to a depression that had almost immobilized her:

Q- [Do you agree?:] My involvement in the seniors' centre has helped me overcome the fears I had about being a widow.

SCJ- Well, I would say yes.

Q- Can you explain that or tell me about it?

SCJ- Because you're broadening yourself when you join a centre, you're broadening your horizons, you see.

SKX, who spent 14 years caring for a sick husband, experienced what appears to be a nervous breakdown followed by a dependency on prescription drugs and a hospital stay associated with bereavement. She joined the seniors' centre at the urging of her social worker in order to "try and make some new friends". Her entire interview was marked by a sense of determination, exemplified by the comment:

Well, I think that perhaps when I came out of the hospital I made up my mind I was going to fight as hard as I could because I never wanted to go back in there again.

Over and over again she made it clear that joining the seniors' centre was part of her plan to "get better" by finding companionship and activities.

The women in Group 4 spoke definitively about making conscious decisions to seek out the seniors' centre and about their level of activity in the centre. The women in Group 3, in contrast, did not convey the same sense of consciously choosing the church, and rarely did they refer to their choice as part of a process of rebuilding their lives.

W. I. Thomas suggests that a difference exists among individuals in the extent to which they may attempt to widen or narrow the sphere within which adaptation takes place. Some individuals, faced with an event which upsets life organization (such as widowhood), may attempt to maintain old patterns of behaviour and try to re-establish stability by using previously developed responses to life events. Others may attempt to find new ideas and approaches to deal with the event.

The widows in this study found both church and seniors' centre involvement to be useful to them in terms of life organization and gaining control over the life course. However, the church and the seniors' centre, as

organizations within society, present different options to widows. Regaining control of the life course in the case of church women, meant utilizing a familiar resource, rather than "widening their sphere of adaptation". Women who joined seniors' centres while their husbands were alive, similarly did not appear to look beyond their immediate involvement for resources. However, for some widows the seniors' centre represented new possibilities, and may provide new solutions to meet their needs for companionship and social activity.

The widows who intentionally sought out the seniors' centre reflect another aspect of Thomas' and Elder's (1974) description of the process whereby people act adaptively to regain control. In situations such as widowhood, loss of control may lead to attentiveness, that is, an increased consciousness about the situation. The widows recruited from seniors' centres demonstrate this feature of regaining control. Some made the decision to join a centre as a response to their new situation. Others were aware of and regulated the extent of their involvement. Women recruited from the churches did not speak of their decisions in such self-conscious terms.

3. c. (ii) An Increased Sense of Independence

Five of the widows who belonged to seniors' centres held a perception of themselves as more independent since the death of their husband; only one widow from the church group referred to such a change. To these women, independence meant being freer to do the things they wanted to do and looking after themselves. The following discussion describes the ways in which these six widows' involvement in a seniors' centre or a church played a role in their changing sense of self as more independent.

Two women (one from a church and one from a seniors' centre) described the way in which their involvement was a cause of their changing self perception. CRJ had joined a gestalt therapy group run by a priest. SFL had become involved in the seniors' centre as a peer counsellor and had also attended many educational events at the centre. Both felt that during their married life they had suppressed themselves, and now they had an opportunity to find the person they had been as young woman. For CRJ finding herself, with the help of the gestalt group, had been a "resurrection experience". SFL, through her interactions in peer counselling training, described herself as more independent through gaining self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. Both clearly identified the organization to which they belonged as instrumental in the change.

The other four women did not explicitly link the centre to their new found independence. However, it provided opportunities for change and a context within which they noted changes in themselves. For example, SHD felt she had become more independent since being widowed because she had to learn to take care of her own finances and investments, which meant increased decision-making, a move to a new community and finding a new social group. She was pleased that her involvement at the seniors' centre provided the opportunity to make new friends which, for her, was a sign of growing independence. She reflected that while it is difficult to break into a new group after being married for 45 years and having had a protected life, "you've got to learn, but this is a wonderful centre over here for that purpose".

Belonging to the centre was something that these five widows had chosen to do for themselves. As a mother, SGC had been involved in activities for her children (guides, scouts, sports, etc.), or had curtailed activities because

of her husband. At one point she revelled in her new found freedom to belong to a theatre group which caused her to be out late at night, something that was not possible when her husband was alive since his dinner had to be on the table at 5:00 p.m. SKX, a fairly recent widow, felt that in the long run going to the seniors' centre would be good for her. She was determined to overcome the devastating effect widowhood had on her; the seniors' centre represented an opportunity to keep herself going, to maintain her health and, very importantly, avoid hospitalization or becoming dependent on her daughter. SCJ saw herself building a new life, which meant coming to terms with the fact that she could not simply go on as if her husband was still alive. The seniors' centre played a role in her changed self perception: "I think that, you know, it made me, it helped to make me realize that there was just me and it's me now, it's got to where it's just me." As she built her new life alone, the seniors' centre provided her with a place to do the things that she wanted to do with people she wanted to be with.

Elder (1974) describes one of the processes of adaptation during life course transitions as the redefinition of self. Five of the widows in the seniors' centres and one in the church noted a changing self-perception towards increased independence.⁵ Their organization was described as providing a setting in which they were able to become more independent. In their new life situation, the person on whom they had depended for such things as companionship, structure in daily routine, and decision making, was no longer available to them. As a result, the struggle was to become independent. The seniors' centre in particular was a context in which a sense of increased independence came with the development of increased self-esteem, social skills and relationships. Seniors' centres do not necessarily "cause" the

independence in widows; however, seniors' centres appear to provide the conditions within which widows attempting to meet the challenge of a disrupted life course are able to develop behaviours, especially those of increased independence, which help them to regain control of the situation.

Widows from the church (other than the one who attended the Gestalt therapy group) may not have described themselves as becoming more independent because the church, as a familiar setting, did not bring to mind a sense that they were somehow different as a result of their involvement in the church. While they may have thought of themselves as more independent since the death of their husband, church was not necessarily a new venture and therefore may not have been associated with a changing self-concept.

3. c. (iii) Changing Roles

The questionnaire did not elicit much reflection on the development of new roles in conjunction with widowhood. However, three women from churches and two from seniors' centres described ways in which their involvements provided them with an opportunity to find new roles. Generally, the new roles they described were ones which made them feel useful within their organization.

Two women in the church increased their involvement in official positions within the church. One widow became very active as a layperson in both her local congregation and in the wider church organization. When asked whether her involvement in the church helped her to feel good about herself, she responded yes because "you're not just sitting around and doing nothing, and you're involved with other people and trying to help other people." The other widow (who held a position on the church executive) said that being a part of

the running of the church helped her to "feel useful" and gave her "a purpose in life." A third widow from the church depicted her role as the oldest and most long-term widow in the congregation. As such, her experience lent itself to a role as one who could be of help to more recent widows.

Two women from seniors' centres indicated that their involvement had provided them with opportunities to take on roles in which they could be helpful to others. One of these widows trained to become a peer counsellor. Belonging to the seniors' centre made her feel good about herself as a widow because she was able to identify with other widows and help them. Her pleasure in her new role within the centre is captured in the following comment:

I was inspired by what I heard at various seminars and it inspired me to want to help others. I feel people are grateful for what I have done for them; I can feel their love when I walk in a room and I feel appreciated.

The other volunteered to help at various events at the seniors' centre, describing herself as a "volunteer's volunteer". She expressed special concern for men at the centre who had been widowed, concerned that they had a more difficult time than women. She made a point of attempting to make them feel welcome by talking to them and inviting them to come back to the centre.

The process of regaining control over the life course, as described by both Elder (1974) and Thomas, is one of reconstructing the organization of one's life in response to an event which has upset that organization. The official positions which some of the participants took in their organizations were, of course, pre-existing. For these women, part of the process of reconstructing their lives meant taking advantage of structures within which they could place themselves. (See Section 3. b. (iii) for a further discussion of the ways in which

the structure of the organization provides options to regain control over the life course.)

4. Summary of Results: Transition to Widowhood

Both churches and seniors' centres were found to be helpful to women in the process of regaining control over the life course after the death of their husbands. The organizations are similar in some ways, different in others. The key findings are summarized according to themes presented in Section 3.

Seniors' centres (and to a lesser extent, churches) were utilized by the widows in this study in a number of ways to respond to the impact of widowhood. Activities at the centres provided a distraction and thus some relief from the constant awareness of the feelings associated with grief. The structures of the organizations (in terms of scheduled activities) acted as a "ready-made situation" into which widows who were attempting to "get on with life" could integrate themselves. The activity of regaining control during a life course transition may not necessarily demand complete "attentiveness" at all times.

Widows from both organizations felt a sense of belonging, that is they felt welcome in their organization. Sense of belonging may be an aspect of what is needed for an environment (such as a church or seniors' centre) to be considered supportive to women attempting to reconstruct their lives.

Other widows in both organizations were described as a resource for the widows in this study. They were helpful as people who had shared a similar experience and they provided the opportunity to compare oneself with others. Widows in seniors' centres found that the predominance of widows in the membership added to their feeling of comfort. The context of many widows

added to the options the participants saw in terms of negotiating their own transition to widowhood.

Widows described a number of ways in which they were able to share the experience of widowhood with others in their organization. Both churches and seniors' centres provided opportunities for self-reflection and self-disclosure concerning the transition to widowhood. However, in general, the widows in this study did not specifically seek out situations in which they discussed their widowhood in great detail. Attentiveness, as one aspect of the way in which control is regained, may vary in the level to which individuals choose to be conscious of their situation.

Priests were identified as an important resource by widows from the churches, and also by widows from the seniors' centres who attended church. Clergy responded compassionately to the widow's grief. Hearing the priest share his or her own experiences of grief was an important resource for some widows. They were also helpful to some participants in terms of helping them develop a new identity as widow. Priests conveyed aspects of religious belief about death which some of the widows incorporated into the process of regaining control over the transition by giving it a particular meaning. In general, the widows in this study who had interactions with clergy, accepted their role as a resource in the transition to widowhood. There was no comparable professional role in seniors' centres.

Widows who had belonged to their particular organization before widowhood found a resource in the continuity of their involvement as a result of long-term friendships and familiar activities. Widows who joined the church after the death of their husbands regarded the church as a familiar setting whereas widows who joined seniors' centres after widowhood described it as a new

venture in their lives. This difference highlights two aspects of the ways in which people differ in the attempt to regain control. First, some seek to widen their sphere of activity while others look to more familiar resources in the process of reconstructing their lives after a significant disruption. Second, regaining control may be characterized by different levels of conscious or "attentive" decision making about use of possible resources. Seniors' centres, as less familiar settings, were a context in which widows generally seemed more aware of the process of regaining control.

The seniors' centre was associated with an increased sense of independence for some of the widows. Opportunities for new activities and friendships provided a context within which the sense of independence could develop. Changing self-definition is one aspect of the process of regaining control over the life course during a transition.

Churches and seniors' centres provided opportunities to take on new roles in both formal structures and informal settings within the organizations. Reconstructing the life course, as part of the process of regaining control, is demonstrated in the descriptions of the specific ways in which widows found an identifiable place for themselves within their organization.

¹ Participants are identified by letter combinations. The first letter, either a C or an S, denotes church or seniors' centre affiliation, respectively. The last two letters were chosen randomly to identify each participant.

²A confidant is defined as someone in whom a participant was willing to confide and with whom she was willing to share her grief and from whom she received emotional support during her bereavement.

³The theology of the priesthood, as it has been developed in various Christian traditions, is beyond the scope of this study. However, much attention has been paid to the nature of the role of the priest, both as a religious functionary and as a source of comfort. Examples can be found in

the works of writers such as H. Nouwen, The Wounded Healer, U.T. Holmes, The Future Shape of Ministry and others.

⁴The way in which the priest seems to have been helpful to some of the widows might explain why the funeral was not spontaneously mentioned by the widows. Funerals are traditional events; specific activities need to be carried out in order for the ritual to be properly conducted. Funerals are held at a time when the widow is still in shock, and it is a time when the priest clearly has the role of conducting the religious rituals associated with death, regardless of any attempts on his or her part to be comforting. It may not be possible for priests to interact with widows in ways that enable the more helpful aspects of the role to be a resource.

⁵The other widows did not mention independence and there is no way of knowing whether or not they perceived a change in themselves, had never thought of themselves as independent or had always thought of themselves as independent.

CHAPTER IV

IV. DISCUSSION

1. Introduction

The research questions for this study are:

How do older women utilize resources from organizational involvement to help in their transition to widowhood? Are there differences depending upon type of involvement (e.g., church versus seniors' centre [i.e., secular] involvement)?

These questions are addressed using the life course perspective, a perspective in which lives are conceived of as pathways, the directions of which may be influenced by a variety of factors, including involvement in a societal institution or a social group. The influence of interpretive traditions within sociology upon the life course perspective has resulted in a view of individuals as having agency in regard to the direction and development of their life course. In particular, Elder (1985b) describes individuals as attempting to maintain control over their life course as they move through transitions, such as widowhood. During transitions, usual patterns of behaviour are disrupted and individuals are faced with the task of life reorganization. Regaining control over life course transitions is achieved through a process in which individuals are attentive to the situation and may seek to redefine it, adjust expectations, utilize resources, assume new roles or statuses, or possibly redefine themselves or others. The way in which control is regained is affected by the context of individuals.

The findings of this study bear on a number of issues relevant to the study of the life course related to the process by which control is regained during a transition. The first section of this chapter provides a discussion of the findings in relation to the concept of control over life course transitions. In

Chapter III, this relationship was addressed in a commentary section which accompanied the presentation of each of the themes which emerged from the interviews. In this chapter, the findings and their relationship to control over the life course are presented in an attempt to provide some answers to the general questions which guide this study.

The second section of this chapter is a discussion of the findings in light of topics related to control over the life course, as reported in the literature on widowhood. These topics are social support, coping strategies and Ferraro's (1984, 1990) compensation thesis. The third section presents some further research directions. The chapter ends with a discussion of possible implications for service providers in churches and seniors' centres.

2. Control over Life Course Transitions: Similarities and Differences Between the Contexts of Church and Seniors' Centre

Elder (1985b) suggests that regaining control during a transition is dependent upon alternatives, conditions and the structured situation in which individuals find themselves. In this study, churches and seniors' centres were found to be both different and similar in terms of the resources they provided for widows.

Widowhood, as a life course transition, fits Elder's (1985b) description of an event which disrupts habitual patterns of behaviour. In response to disruption, individuals are faced with establishing new patterns of behaviour. It should be noted that for some women, continuity of involvement in the church or seniors' centre (i.e., before and after the death of their husband) is a resource. They suggested that their lives had not been disrupted in all areas, and that their organizational involvement proved to be a source of continuity of friends and

familiar activities. However, in general, widowhood is described as a disruptive event.

There are differences in the ways the church and seniors' centre act as a resource for women attempting to reorganize their lives. Joining a seniors' centre is more likely to be characterized as a new experience, a broadening of resources. Women who join a seniors' centre, or who increase their activity in a centre after the death of their husband, speak of their actions as a direct response to widowhood. The seniors' centre is perceived to be a resource providing both activity and companionship. In contrast, becoming involved in a church is not characterized as a new experience. Rejoining the church (even after a long absence) or increasing activity in the church after the husband's death, is not described as a conscious decision in response to widowhood, even though the church is identified as a source of activity and companionship. The church, as a resource, is characterized by familiarity, not new beginnings. It may be, for today's elderly, the church is a familiar setting; most of the participants recruited from churches had, at some point in their lives, been involved in a church. Seniors' centres are a more recent phenomenon in the social life of seniors and are consequently less likely to have the personal historical significance of churches. As such, seniors' centres offer the possibility of "new beginnings" as a way of regaining control during a life course transition.

A similarity between church and seniors' centre is that pre-existing structures within both organizations facilitated the process of establishing new patterns of behaviour. Activities within both organizations offer ready-made situations into which widows may enter in order to "get on with life". Both organizations provide structure in terms a regular schedule of events (activity groups, weekly worship, etc.); widows are able to integrate their own life organization into the schedule

of events offered by either church or seniors' centre. Each organization provides opportunities to take on formal roles associated with duties and activities (e.g., peer counsellor, church official) - another source of structure. Being a member in either organization thus provides a structure around which to rebuild one's life after major disruption such as widowhood.

Elder (1985b) suggests that the process of regaining control over a life course transition demands a level of "attentiveness" to the situation. The context of either church or seniors' centre affects the level of attentiveness to widowhood transition in a number of ways. To begin, both organizations offer formal groups and events which may be utilized as arenas in which issues related to widowhood can be discussed and explored. Also, both organizations are a source of more informal, less intense opportunities to talk about widowhood (usually with other widows) and acknowledge the change in status.

There are, however, some differences between the two organizations in terms of encouraging attentiveness. The presence of large numbers of other widows is important to participants who belonged to seniors' centres; other widows provide a point of comparison, a way to establish success in making the transition to widowhood. Their presence provides a context which enables increased attentiveness to the transition. Additionally, the presence of large numbers of widows (apart from formal or informal interactions), is a source of comfort for the participants from seniors' centres. Widows from churches do not refer to the presence of large numbers of other widows as helpful. Other widows are supportive as friends, however congregations typically are not dominated by any one age group, and thus present widows with a different context than seniors' centres. The priest in the church provides a different opportunity for attentiveness to widowhood; he or she is perceived to be a professional with

whom women in churches could discuss their widowhood. In some cases, the priest brought to the participant's attention the religious aspects of death, and provided an opportunity to reflect on bereavement.

While both organizations provide opportunities to confront the issues associated with widowhood, they also provide opportunities to "forget". The transition to widowhood is often accompanied by very painful emotions, and by a desire to forget what has been lost. Seniors' centres, especially, are described as places to forget one's worries, and participants said they avoid bringing up unhappy subjects. Activities and companionship brought welcome relief. Paradoxically, the context of organizations such as churches and seniors' centres may make it possible to regain control over the life course without always being involved in a process of attentive, rational problem solving activity. As previously noted, it is almost as if some of the participants are carried along by the life and the structures of the organization, without needing to be attentive to structuring and organizing all aspects of their own lives.

Both organizations are used as resources to aid in the process of developing new self-concepts, although in different ways. The seniors' centre is a place in which women view themselves as becoming more independent - it represents new activities, new friends, and a new measure of freedom. The predominance of other widows is a reminder of the new status as widow. For those women in the church who indicate a new self-concept as widow, the primary resource is the priest. In the process of coming to terms with their husband's death through discussions with the priest, these women also come to view themselves as widows.

Elder (1985b) suggests that the supportiveness of a particular setting influences the process of regaining control during a life course transition.

Findings from this study suggest "supportive environments" have varying characteristics. Both organizations provide concrete forms of support in the form of people (e.g., priest, other widows) and activities (e.g., peer counsellors, grief recovery groups) which respond directly to the needs of women who have been widowed. In addition, both organizations provide less tangible support, such as the "sense of belonging" expressed by a number of women. It also may be that the understanding of a supportive environment should not be limited to conceptualizations of comfort and feeling welcome, even though that is the way most of the widows express their experience of their organization. One widow perceived the success she observed in other widows in the seniors' centre as a positive challenge to her own progress. Involvement in groups such as gestalt therapy and peer counselling training are better characterized as sources of challenge and comfort, rather than comfort alone.

A difference between the two organizations is the presence of supportive professionals. The priest is a resource in churches; no comparable professional role in seniors' centres is observed. The priest is identified as a source of comfort because of his or her special knowledge about religious teachings and because of his or her willingness to share personal experiences of transitions. Staff at seniors' centres are not identified as having a similar kind of expertise, although one widow indicated that the staff who led peer counselling had been helpful to her. The identification of certain persons as experts (such as priests), is described by Thomas as a characteristic of the way in which people respond to crises. The question raised by this study is whether future study would lead to the identification of a similar kind of expert in a secular context beyond the seniors' centre.

3. Related Concepts: Social Support, Coping Strategies, and the Compensation Hypothesis

Widows identify the organizations as providing some forms of instrumental support (e.g., providing rides); as expected, this is not the dominant form of support. The primary form of support is affective or emotional support. In the church the major source is the priest, although friends (often other widows) are also identified as being helpful in this way. In seniors' centres, other widows are the main source of affective support. Affective support from others in the organization is more likely to take the form of feeling comfortable and a sense of belonging, rather than emotional support characterized by deep sharing of feelings.

The expectation that affective support would result from the religious nature and activities of the church is not described by the participants. Other than in their interactions with the priest, the interviews with the church widows do not provide support for the notion of the church as a place to grieve openly. Many widows (in both organizations) express discomfort with the idea of openly showing their emotions. An omission in the interview was the lack of a question specifically referring to the funeral. This, however, led to an interesting finding - none of the widows from churches referred to the funeral as an important part of their transition to widowhood. For example, it was not identified as a worship service they remembered as having helped them. The timing of the funeral, usually within a week after the death and at a time when the shock of the death still overwhelms the new widow, may undermine its effectiveness as an affective social support.

In terms of coping strategies, interactions with the priest may be described as examples of palliative coping strategies (i.e., strategies in which individuals

regulate their emotional response to a situation); the role of the priest in offering religious explanations for the meaning of death and suffering was described by the participants as helping them to better understand the meaning of what had happened. Belonging to the church and sharing a religious world view with others do not emerge as palliative coping strategies. Training as a peer counsellor (and with it the opportunity to reflect on the event of widowhood), described by one participant from a seniors' centre, was the only example of palliative coping strategies from that organization.

With reference to Ferraro's (1984, 1990) compensation thesis, it is not possible to know whether the life style and activities of the women persisted relatively unchanged after widowhood, since the design of this study is not longitudinal. However, many of the women described a situation in which, after their husband's death, they looked for activities and companions to fill the void. This is especially true of women recruited from seniors' centres, many of whom explicitly stated this as their reason for joining. Women from churches indicate that their level of activity had also increased after the death of their husband. With this sample of women, Lopata's (1973) earlier concern that widows tend to be isolated does not apply. However, the women in this sample generally do not have financial concerns, all had family members with whom they are in contact, and none have health problems which might lead to isolation.

4. Directions for Future Study

The findings of this study suggest a number of possible future research directions. The following discussion begins with a consideration of the development of the concept of control as it is used in the life course perspective. Next are some suggestions concerning methodological approaches in the study

of the transition to widowhood. Finally, substantive areas needing further research are presented.

4. a. Developing the Concept of Control

4. a. (i) Attentiveness

The results of this study indicate a need to develop the concept of "attentiveness" which both Elder (1985b) and Thomas argue must accompany a crisis or transition. In this study, attentiveness to the changes that accompany widowhood takes a number of different forms. It includes involvement in therapy groups and other groups in which the topic of widowhood and its impact are discussed. Attentiveness also occurs when widows consider their situation and make decisions to join or to increase their activity in an organization in response. Attentiveness can also include interactions between widows in which there is a shared awareness of their common status as widow, but not a great deal of discussion about that fact. Finally, being attentive may simply involve observing that the dominant group in the organization to which one belongs is widows; sharing that status can provide an opportunity to compare oneself with others.

The concept of attentiveness may best be described as a continuum of possible responses and levels of awareness, all of which are influenced by particular contexts. Future research might investigate the behaviours that are associated with high levels of attentiveness compared to those of low levels of attentiveness, as one way of developing an understanding of this concept. It might then be possible to determine whether differences in levels of attentiveness have an impact on the approach widows take to their situation and on the effectiveness of their process of negotiating a transition.

Future research might also investigate the ways in which social organizations interact with the way(s) in which people pay attention to life course transitions. In this study, integration into the life and activity of the organization appears to enable some women to move through the transition of widowhood in ways that allowed them to "forget" what had happened to them.

Finally, future research concerning churches, seniors' centres or other organizations to which elderly widows belong, could investigate the specific structures or activities which have been designed to provide opportunities for widows to be attentive to their new status. Many of the women in this study expressed little interest in activities such as grief recovery support groups or widows self-help groups. Reasons for this lack of interest, and how this affects our understanding of attentiveness to a crisis, would have implications for our understanding of the ways in which control over the transition to widowhood (as well as other transitions) is gained.

4. a. (ii) Supportive Environments

The characteristics of a supportive environment need further investigation. The presence of other widows and the role of the priest are examples of the way in which church and seniors' centres provide a supportive environment, in terms of both instrumental and affective social support. However, environments also seem to be supportive when they involve some measure of challenge, at least for some widows (either as the result of self-comparisons with others, or from involvement in intensive therapeutic situations). The concept of support, as it is used in the context of a discussion about regaining control over the life course, should go beyond ways in which individuals find relief from negative feelings. Future studies might investigate whether the requirements of a supportive

environment for the purpose of reorganizing the life structure need to include aspects of challenge, for example, challenging people concerning the ways they reflect upon their their situation and how they might utilize resources available to them.

Research on social support tends to focus on the more concrete (and thus, more quantifiable) elements of social support such as the structure of support networks, types of people in the network, and so on. The findings of this study suggest there may be less tangible characteristics of environments which lead to a perception of supportiveness (e.g., the sense of belonging or feeling welcome which was identified as an important feature of both organizations). Further qualitative research might uncover these less obvious characteristics of supportive environments.

4. b. Development of Methodological Approaches

In order to compare the two organizations, participants were recruited separately from each organization. Building on this study, and to provide another approach to the comparison of organizations, it might be useful to interview women who belong to both organizations, asking them to make the comparisons. Some of the participants in this study belong to both a church and a seniors' centre; at times they spontaneously made comparative comments. At other times the interviewer pursued comparisons, but not on a consistent basis. People who belong to more than one organization may have clear reasons for their different involvements. They may be able to shed some light on what it is that different social groups offer in terms of the process of regaining control after a transition.

Research on the life course has tended to be dominated by studies of transitions, rather than a focus on trajectories. A number of commentators in the field (e.g., Hagestad, 1990) have noted the need for more investigation of the ways in which different transitions across the life course interact with each other. Findings from this study support the need for a broader focus. For example, previous involvement in religious organizations, especially during transitions such as establishing a family, seems to have had an impact on the perceptions of options provided by religious organizations as a resource during the later transition to widowhood. Methodologically, it would be difficult to follow the careers of people in a variety of contexts over a long period of time. However, retrospective studies which focus a participant on specific aspects of her life history, might open the way to a better understanding of the connections among transitions across life course trajectories.

4. c. Development of Substantive Issues

This study supports those who argue that there is a need to investigate the heterogeneity of people's lives within the life course perspective (e.g., Marshall, 1980). The transition to widowhood, in the context of two different organizations, takes on different characteristics as a result of differences in the resources offered by the organizations and differences in the utilization of the resources by the women who belong to them. Future research might add to our understanding of the heterogeneity of experience by considering other possible sources of diversity among older women and how that diversity has an impact on the way in which control is regained during a life course transition. One example might be a comparison of widows who were employed at the time of their husband's death with those who were not, and how that interacts with

utilization of resources from different organizations. Another example is the way in which the economic consequence of widowhood is related to the choices made by women as they survey their options and make decisions about which resources they might utilize. This could entail more detailed descriptions of organizations such as seniors' centres in terms of the class background of members, in order to determine whether or not this characteristic has an effect on the perception of seniors' centres as a resource for widows of different economic circumstances.

The finding that the priest plays an important role in the transition to widowhood for those women who belonged to churches, suggests future areas of study to build on our understanding of the nature of the role of the priest. What is it that causes the priest to be identified as an expert, and what further aspects of people's interactions with priests cause them to be perceived as a useful resource for those people who seek them during a crisis or life course transition? The lack of a comparable professional role in seniors' centres raises questions as to whether any comparable professional exists among the various agencies which offer support to widows.

The lack of spontaneous mention of the funeral on the part of any of the widows (both those recruited from churches and those recruited from seniors' centres who may have had a funeral for their husbands) raises questions about the place of that ritual in the lives of those who are in mourning. We need to know whether the length of time since the death of the husbands resulted in the women in this study forgetting possible effects of the funeral. Women more recently widowed might shed some light on the impact of the funeral. A future study of widows belonging to the church might include a set of questions which specifically focus on the impact of the funeral.

5. Implications for Service Providers

The findings of this study suggest some implications for those people in churches and seniors' centres who provide services to older widows. To begin, the role of the priest in the lives of some of the participants needs to be acknowledged, particularly in church settings where there may be a tendency to rely on non-ordained people to provide pastoral care. While resources are limited in terms of the time and energy of the clergy, for those members of the church experiencing a life transition, the nature of the role of the priest may be an important element of the way in which they negotiate the transition.

Priests and those offering pastoral care to those recently bereaved, need to consider ways to increase the effectiveness of the funeral as a ritual marking death. One possibility is to institute a second ritual, perhaps on the anniversary of the death. At this later point, people may be more receptive to the message which priests hope to convey during the funeral. This might then increase the ability to utilize the benefits of the ritual (e.g., the meaning of death and promises of hope, as they are conveyed through the funeral, might be incorporated into new definitions of the situation of widowhood).

An interesting finding from the interviews with women in both organizations, and in particular seniors' centres, is the general lack of interest in resources such as grief recovery groups and widows' self-help groups. On the other hand, at least one participant found her involvement in peer counselling to be a significant aspect of her transition. This reflects the nature of the debates (particularly in the United States) concerning the nature of seniors' centres (i.e., as voluntary organizations or as service providers) (Ferraro & Cobb, 1987). For those who develop programs for seniors' centres, perhaps the most obvious

conclusion from these findings is that members come looking for a wide variety of resources. There is a need to avoid the assumption of older people as "needy" and thus requiring extensive support - many of the widows in this study demonstrate an ability to find what they need in order to make the transition, and what they need is opportunities for activity and companionship. There is also a need to avoid the assumption that older people will avoid involvement in groups that challenge them or remind them of their loss (i.e., increase their attentiveness to the issues of the transitions within which they find themselves). Variety of resources should include activities which challenge widows to reflect on their bereavement (e.g., gestalt therapy, peer counselling training). Both the seniors' centres and the churches from which participants were recruited for this study, offered their members a wide variety of resources - which leads to an obvious implication for others who work in similar settings.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PART 1:

SCREENING QUESTIONS BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND MAJOR LIFE EVENTS

NAME:

What year were you born?
Your current age is therefore:

Marriage and widowhood:

How old were you when you were married?
How old were you when you were widowed?
Therefore, you were married for _ years and you have been widowed for _____ years.

Family:

Do you have any children?
How many children do you have?
What are their present ages?
I'd like you to describe the type and frequency of contact you have with your children?

Child	Age	Type of contact	Frequency	Satisfaction
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Would you say that your relationships with them are:
fulfilling
satisfactory
strained

How many grandchildren do you have?
What are their present ages?
I'd like you to describe the type and frequency of contact you have with your grandchildren?

Grandchild	Age	Type of contact	Frequency	Satisfaction
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Would you say that your relationships with them are:
fulfilling
satisfactory
strained

Do you have any brothers or sisters or other family members with whom you have contact?

I'd like you to describe the type and frequency of contact you have with your these people?

Sibling/relative Age Type of contact Frequency Satisfaction

Would you say that your relationships with them are:
fulfilling
satisfactory
strained

Ethnicity:

What is your ethnic background?

Employment history:

Have you ever been employed in the work force?
(If yes)
How many years did you work in the paid labour force?
Full time or part-time mostly?
What was your typical job?
At what age did you leave the work force?

Financial status:

How would you rate your financial status?
_____ I am well off financially - I have more than enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and enjoy myself as I please
_____ My financial situation is comfortable - I have enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and spend money on some extras
_____ My financial situation is adequate - I have enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and I do not worry about unexpected expenses
_____ My financial situation causes me some concern - I have just enough money to meet my basic needs (such as food and shelter) but I would be unable to meet unexpected expenses
_____ My financial situation is extremely stressful - I often worry about meeting the costs of my basic needs (such as food and shelter) and I would not be able to meet an unexpected expense

Health:

How would you rate your health compared to other women of your age:
Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

Do you have any illnesses or disabilities which prevent you from being as active as you would like to be (eg. arthritis, high blood pressure)?

Education:

What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

PART 2: SCREENING QUESTIONS BASED ON CURRENT INVOLVEMENTS

1. Do you currently belong to any of the following kinds of organizations or activities?

- a) Senior Citizens' Recreation Centre
- b) A Church
- c) Service Club
- d) Volunteer Organization
- e) Professional Organization
- f) Informal gatherings which occur regularly, such as a bridge club
- g) Sports or other recreation event which occurs on a regular basis, such as a bowling league, bingo.
- h) Other _____

2. How long have you been involved in this activity or organization?

Years

- a) Senior Citizens' Recreation Centre
- b) A Church
- c) Service Club
- d) Volunteer Organization
- e) Professional Organization
- f) Informal gatherings which occur regularly, such as a bridge club
- g) Sports or other recreation event which occurs on a regular basis, such as a bowling league, bingo.
- h) Other _____

Were you a member of a church or seniors' centre before your husband died?

How important would you say your involvement in the seniors' centre/ church is?

Would you say:

It is very important to me; it is where I meet most of my friends, I enjoy the activities, and has been a life line during difficult times. I would miss it a great deal if it were closed down.

It is important to me; many of my friends are members and I enjoy activities. I would miss it if it were closed down.

It is somewhat important to me; some of my friends are members and generally I enjoy the activities. However, I would not miss it too much if it were closed down.

It is not very important to me at all. I go to be with friends and do some of the activities, but I would not miss it if it were closed down.

PART 3: LEVEL AND KIND OF INVOLVEMENT

a) Questions to be asked of those who belong to a Senior Citizens' Recreation Centre

How many times a week do you attend the centre?
In the last month what activities did you attend?

Do you attend any of the following held at the centre:
special meetings
meals
organizational meetings
trips
parties
other events

If yes to any of the above, rate frequency according to following:

How frequently do you attend this event:

1. whenever one is held
2. once in a while
3. only for special occasions, such as Christmas

Have you ever been on the board or on a committee or in another official position?

When and for how long?

Why did you stop that involvement?

Would you consider being on the board or committee at this time?

Was there a time when you were more involved in the centre?

Less involved?

What kinds of things influenced your decision to be more or less involved?

Has your involvement changed since the death of your husband?

(If yes)

More involved

Less involved

Involved in different types of activities

Can you tell me about why the change happened?

How would you rate the following possible reasons for why you are involved in the Centre? (Beginning with 1 as the primary reason you are involved)

Rating

I enjoy this kind of social activity

It is a place to meet people

It helps me to overcome loneliness

It makes me feel good to be involved and active

I have always been involved in this kind of organization

I like to be in a setting where most people are my age and share my interests

I like to be with people of different ages who share my interests

It gives meaning to my life, gives me a focus

It provides me with worthwhile activities

other _____

Can you tell me a bit about why you picked _____ as your first choice?

Are your reasons for belonging to this type of centre different to what they would have been when you were younger?

Have you made friends at the centre?

Would you say that your closest friends belong to the centre?

Is there anything about your involvement at the seniors' centre that we have not covered and which you think I should be aware of?

b) Questions to be asked of those who belong to a Church

How many times a week do you attend church?

Which services do you attend?

In the last month what activities other than worship did you attend?

Do you attend any of the following held at the church:

special meetings

meals

organizational meetings

trips

parties

other events

If yes to any of the above, then rate frequency according to following:

How frequently do you attend this event:

1. whenever one is held

2. once in a while

3. only for special occasions, such as Christmas

Have you ever been on the board or on a committee or in another official position?

When and for how long?

Why did you stop that involvement?

Would you consider being on the board or a committee at this time?

Was there a time when you were more involved in the church?

Less involved?

What kinds of things influenced your decision to be more or less involved?

Has your involvement changed since the death of your husband?

(If yes)

More involved

Less involved

Involved in different types of activities

Can you tell me about why the change happened?

How would you rate the following possible reasons for why you are involved in the Church? (Beginning with 1 as the primary reason you are involved)

Rating

_____ I enjoy this kind of social activity

_____ It is a place to meet people

_____ It helps me to overcome loneliness

_____ It makes me feel good to be involved and active

_____ I have always been involved in this kind of organization

_____ I like to be in a setting where most people are my age and share my interests

_____ I like to be with people of different ages who share my interests

_____ It gives meaning to my life, gives me a focus

_____ It provides me with worthwhile activities

_____ other _____

Can you tell me a bit about why you picked _____ as your first choice?

Are your reasons for belonging to the church different to what they would have been when you were younger?

Have you made friends at the church?

Would you say that your closest friends belong to the church?

Is there anything about your involvement at the church that we have not covered and which you think I should be aware of?

END OF SCREENING QUESTIONS

PART 4: REFLECTIONS ON WIDOWHOOD

I would like you to think back to when you were first widowed and to your immediate responses to the death of your husband.

In general, what would you say kept you going at that time? In other words, what kept you on an even keel?

Can you describe to me some of your strongest feelings at that time? In other words, what does it feel like to be widowed?

How did you cope with these feelings during the initial time after his death?

Who do you remember as being most helpful to you as you coped with your feelings at that time?

In what ways were they helpful to you?

Were there any practical concerns that needed immediate attention?

How did you cope with these concerns?

Who do you remember as being most helpful to you as you coped with these practical concerns at that time?

In what ways were they helpful to you?

Now I would like you to think about being a widow in the present, a few years after your husband's death.

Can you describe to me some of your strongest feelings about the situation now?

Are these feelings different from the earlier ones?

How do you cope with your current feelings about widowhood?

Who do you find is most helpful to you as you cope with your feelings at this time?

In what ways are they helpful to you?

Are there any practical concerns that need your attention now?

Are these concerns different from the earlier ones?

How did you cope with these concerns?

Who do you find is most helpful to you as you cope with these practical concerns at this time?

In what ways are they helpful to you?

Can you tell me about any ways in which becoming widowed has changed you, for example, has it changed your personality, your life goals, or your immediate priorities?

How are you different now from when you were married?

Has anyone been helpful to you as you have undergone these changes?

In what ways have they been helpful?

What did it mean to you to become a widow?

What is the hardest thing to accept about being widowed?

Some women report that they do not like the word "widow". What are your feelings about the word?

PART 5: THE TRANSITION TO WIDOWHOOD

1. Questions for those involved in a seniors' centre

a) My involvement in the seniors' centre has helped me overcome the fears I had about being a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

b) The seniors' centre provides me with a place to talk about becoming a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

c) Belonging to the seniors' centre helps me feel good about myself as a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

d) At the seniors' centre I have received information which helps me to understand the process of bereavement:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

e) My involvement in the seniors' centre resulted in a lot of practical help when I was first widowed:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

f) My involvement in the seniors' centre had little impact on the way I coped with becoming a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

g) Knowledge about the transition to widowhood and issues of importance to grieving people are well known and easily talked about at the seniors' centre:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

h) At the seniors' centre there is an ease with and acceptance of widowhood, and I feel comfortable about being a widow when I am there:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

i) The seniors' centre is a place where I feel free to mourn the loss of my husband.

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

j) The seniors centre is a place where I feel comfortable with by bereavement

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

k) After my husband died, my involvement in the seniors' centre gave me a feeling of usefulness and provided me with a purpose in life.

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

l) My involvement in the seniors' centre gave me a sense of well-being, that life would be okay even though I had lost my husband.

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

m) My involvement in the seniors' centre gave me a sense of being able to keep responding to the demands of daily life, even though I was grieving.

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

n) My involvement in the seniors' centre helped me to gain perspective on life when I became a widow.

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

Thinking back to the initial period of widowhood, was the seniors' centre or anyone in it particularly helpful to you as you tried to deal with the situation?

Have you ever talked about being widowed with another member of the seniors centre?

What kinds of things did you discuss?

Have you ever sought out a staff member or peer counsellor at the seniors centre to discuss your concerns about widowhood, or to talk about other issues or a crises you experienced related to the death of your husband? Would you tell me about that incident?

Does your centre hold information meetings on topics related to widowhood and do you attend these?

Can you tell me about one such event and why you found it helpful?

In a previous part of our discussion, you said that you felt _____ when you were first widowed. Was being a member of the seniors' centre helpful at that time?

You mention now that you feel _____ as a widow? Is being a member of the seniors' centre helpful in dealing with this feeling?

One of the things you said earlier was that the hardest thing about being widowed is _____. Has the seniors' centre been a place where you have been able to find a way to understand this or deal with it in a helpful way?

Is there anything about your involvement in the seniors' centre and your experience of widowhood that we have not covered and which you think I should know about?

2. Questions for those involved in a church

a) My involvement in the church has helped me to cope with my feelings about being a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

b) The church provides me with a place to talk about becoming a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

c) Belonging to the church helps me feel good about myself as a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

d) At the church I have received information which helps me to understand the process of bereavement:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

e) My involvement in the church resulted in a lot of practical help when I was first widowed:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

f) My involvement in the church had little impact on the way I coped with becoming a widow:

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

g) Knowledge about the transition to widowhood and issues of importance to grieving people are well known and easily talked about at my church:
strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

h) At the church there is an ease with and acceptance of widowhood and I feel comfortable about being a widow when I am there:
strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

i) The church is a place where I feel free to mourn the loss of my husband.
strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

j) The church is a place where I feel comfortable with by bereavement
strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

k) After my husband died, my involvement in the church gave me a feeling of usefulness and provided me with a purpose in life.
strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

l) My involvement in the church gave me a sense of well-being, that life would be okay even though I had lost my husband.
strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

m) My involvement in the church gave me a sense of being able to keep responding to the demands of daily life, even though I was grieving.
strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

n) My involvement in the church helped me to gain perspective on life when I became a widow.

strongly agree 5 4 3 2 1 strongly disagree

Can you tell me why you feel this way?

Is there an experience that would help me understand?

Thinking back to the initial period of widowhood, was the church or anyone in it particularly helpful to you as you tried to deal with the situation?

Have you ever talked about being widowed with another member of your church?

What kinds of things did you discuss?

Have you ever sought out a priest or other professional person at your church to discuss your concerns about widowhood, or to talk about other issues or a crises you experienced related to the death of your husband? Would you tell me about that incident?

Does your church hold information meetings on topics related to widowhood and do you attend these?

Can you tell me about one such event and why you found it helpful?

Have you ever found a sermon or worship service particularly helpful to you in terms of your bereavement?

Would you tell me about that experience.

In a previous part of our discussion, you said that you felt _____ when you were first widowed. Was being a member of the church helpful at that time?

You mention now that you feel _____ as a widow? Is being a member of the church helpful in dealing with this feeling?

One of the things you said earlier was that the hardest thing about being widowed is _____. Has the church been a place where you have been able to find a way to understand this?

Is there anything about your involvement in the church and your experience of widowhood that we have not covered and which you think I should know about?

PART 6: QUESTIONS ABOUT PERSONAL SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Would you say that you accept what might be called traditional Christian beliefs? If not, is there a religious tradition with which you identify?

Would you say that God helps you in your daily life?

(If yes)

Can you tell me some ways in which God has helped you?

Has your belief in God been a source of support during your bereavement?

(If yes)

Would you agree or with any of the following statements (check those agreed with):

Prayer has been an important source of comfort for me during my bereavement

God is a source of comfort when I am feeling sad or depressed

God helps me to overcome my fear of the unknown

God helps me to overcome my feelings of loneliness

Knowing God is there helps to lessen my worries about finances

God gives me the strength to cope with the practical concerns of life

(If agreed with) Can you tell me about this aspect of God's support of you?

Are there any other ways in which your faith has been helpful to you during your bereavement?

What is your concept of God?

Where do you find God?

Have your thoughts about God and your own personal spirituality changed with bereavement?

Question for church members who answer the questions about God positively:

Your faith in God seems to have been an important source of support during your bereavement. Was your involvement in the church helpful in terms of finding comfort in your faith? Would you have found the same comfort in your faith had you not been a member of the church?

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PRIESTS

Date

The Reverend _____,
_____ Anglican Church,
Address

Dear _____;

My name is Maureen Ashfield and I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology at Simon Fraser University. I am working on my Master's thesis and my area of interest is widows and their social supports. I have attached a description of my study (which will eventually be given to widows who agree to participate in the study) in order to acquaint you with my project.

I am writing to you with the hope that you may be able to suggest women from your parish who might be interested in taking part in my study, and who fit some basic criteria. They must be women who are 70 years old or older, who have been widowed for at least two years, who have some family supports and who are regular attenders of events and worship at the church.

I will telephone you within the next week (or you may contact me at xxx-xxxx) in order to discuss the study with you and, if possible, to receive the names and telephone numbers of women you might suggest. You may decide to contact possible participants first in order to check their response, but I am not expecting you to do this additional work.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Yours truly,

Maureen Ashfield

LETTER TO DIRECTORS OF SENIORS' CENTRES

Date

_____, Director,
_____ Seniors' Centre

Address

Dear _____;

My name is Maureen Ashfield and I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology at Simon Fraser University. I am working on my Master's thesis and my area of interest is widows and their social supports. I have attached a description of my study (which will eventually be given to widows who agree to participate in the study) in order to acquaint you with my project.

I am writing to you with the hope that you may be able to suggest women from your centre who might be interested in taking part in my study, and who fit some basic criteria. They must be women who are 70 years old or older, who have been widowed for at least two years, who have some family supports and who are regular attenders of events at the centre.

I will telephone you within the next week (or you may contact me at xxx-xxxx) in order to discuss the study with you and, if possible, to receive the names and telephone numbers of women you might suggest. You may decide to contact possible participants first in order to check their response, but I am not expecting you to do this additional work.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Yours truly,

Maureen Ashfield

APPENDIX C

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STUDY

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY FOR CHURCH WIDOWS

My name is Maureen Ashfield, and I am a graduate student at Simon Fraser University. I am presently working on my Master's thesis, and I am particularly interested in the lives of elderly widows. Widowhood is a very important event in the lives of many older women in Canada. For many women it is an event which brings with it deep feelings, changes in daily life and many decisions for the future. During the time of bereavement, widows often seek the support of other people. In this project, the purpose is to better understand the sources of support which are sought by widows, and the ways in which these sources of support were found to be helpful or not helpful. I want to interview a number of widows who are at least seventy years old and who have been widowed for two to five years, in order to ask them about the experience of being widowed and the kinds of support they received. In order to find widows who might be willing to take part in my study, I contacted the priest of your parish and asked her/him to suggest some members who might be interested in taking part.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in the following steps. First there will be a brief interview over the telephone concerned with questions about your health, your education, your satisfaction with your financial position (but not your actual income), your family contacts and your involvement in various organizations in your community such as clubs, bridge groups, and so on. This is to ensure some similarity among the participants, and once these questions have been covered, I can let you know whether or not you will be asked to take part in the second part of the interview.

If you are asked to continue and you agree to take part in the second step of the interview, we will set up a time and a place convenient to you to complete the interview. You will be asked questions about your experience of widowhood and the support you sought from others. It is expected that this will take one to two hours.

You may refuse to answer any questions, and once you indicate that you would prefer to not answer a question we will simply move on to the next question. You also may request to end the interview at any time.

All of the information gathered in both the interview over the telephone and the interview in person will be kept confidential, which means that no one but the interviewer and the faculty person supervising this project at Simon Fraser University will see your interview forms. Your name will not appear on the interview form. Some of what you say will be referred to in the final thesis since it will be written based on the data from the interviews. But information from the interviews will be presented in such a way that no one will be able to identify your participation in the study. Once the study is completed, all of the information gathered in the interviews will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about any aspect of the study please feel free to raise them before or during the interview.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY FOR SENIORS' CENTRE WIDOWS

My name is Maureen Ashfield, and I am a graduate student at Simon Fraser University. I am presently working on my Master's thesis, and I am particularly interested in the lives of elderly widows. Widowhood is a very important event in the lives of many older women in Canada. For many women it is an event which brings with it deep feelings, changes in daily life and many decisions for the future. During the time of bereavement, widows often seek the support of other people. In this project, the purpose is to better understand the sources of support which are sought by widows, and the ways in which these sources of support were found to be helpful or not helpful. I want to interview a number of widows who are at least seventy years old and who have been widowed for two to five years, in order to ask them about the experience of being widowed and the kinds of support they received. In order to find widows who might be willing to take part in my study, I contacted the director of the seniors' centre of which you are a member and asked her/him to suggest some members who might be interested in taking part.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in the following steps. First there will be a brief interview over the telephone concerned with questions about your health, your education, your satisfaction with your financial position (but not your actual income), your family contacts and your involvement in various organizations in your community such as clubs, bridge groups, and so on. This is to ensure some similarity among the participants, and once these questions have been covered, I can let you know whether or not you will be asked to take part in the second part of the interview.

If you are asked to continue and you agree to take part in the second step of the interview, we will set up a time and a place convenient to you to complete the interview. You will be asked questions about your experience of widowhood and the support you sought from others. It is expected that this will take one to two hours.

You may refuse to answer any questions, and once you indicate that you would prefer to not answer a question we will simply move on to the next question. You also may request to end the interview at any time.

All of the information gathered in both the interview over the telephone and the interview in person will be kept confidential, which means that no one but the interviewer and the faculty person supervising this project at Simon Fraser University will see your interview forms. Your name will not appear on the interview form. Some of what you say will be referred to in the final thesis since it will be written based on the data from the interviews. But information from the interviews will be presented in such a way that no one will be able to identify your participation in the study. Once the study is completed, all of the information gathered in the interviews will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about any aspect of the study please feel free to raise them before or during the interview.

APPENDIX D

Simon Fraser University

INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Note: The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks and benefits involved. Your signature on this form will indicate that you have received the document described below regarding this project, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this project.

Having been asked by Maureen Ashfield of the Sociology/Anthropology department of Simon Fraser University to participate in a research project, I have read the procedures specified in the document entitled "Description of the Study".

I understand that I will be asked a series of questions about myself and my experience as a widow, and that the information collected by Maureen Ashfield will be kept confidential.

I also understand that I may register any complaint I might have about the project with the chief researcher named above or with Dr. Ellen Gee, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Simon Fraser University (291-3193) or with Dr. Michael Kenny, Chairman of the Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Simon Fraser University (291-3146).

I agree to be interviewed on the matters described in the document Description of Study.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____ TEL. NO.: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

WITNESS: _____

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