University of San Diego

Digital USD

Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

1995

Experiences of Moral Commitment: A Phenomenological Study

Suzanne West MacRenato EdD

University of San Diego

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations>

Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Digital USD Citation

West MacRenato, Suzanne EdD, "Experiences of Moral Commitment: A Phenomenological Study" (1995). *Dissertations*. 605.

<https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations/605>

This Dissertation: Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital USD. For more information, please contact digital@sandiego.edu.

**EXPERIENCES OF MORAL COMMITMENT:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

Suzanne West MacRenato

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education**

University of San Diego

1995

Dissertation Committee:

**Mary Scherr, Ph.D., Director
Steven Gelb, Ph.D.
Kathleen Heinrich, Ph.D.**

Copyright @ 1995

by

Suzanne West MacRenato

All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCES OF MORAL COMMITMENT:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

MacRenato, Suzanne West, Ed.D., University of San Diego, 1995. 157 pp.

Director: Mary W. Scherr, Ph.D.

This study's purpose was to increase understanding and meaning of the lived experience of moral commitment as practiced by participants at the time of the study, not in retrospective. Phenomenology was the research methodology selected to elicit participants' understanding of moral commitment through in-depth interviews.

Study participants were referred using selection criteria which included: demonstration of sustained selfless service to others outside of one's work life and a demonstrated tendency to inspire others to engage in similar service. The four women and six men in the study, ranging from 33 to 78 years of age, represented blue-collar and professional occupations.

Open-ended interviews elicited rich descriptions and stories about participants' service to individuals and communities. Through data analysis and identification of common themes, a phenomenological description of the experience of moral commitment emerged.

Findings show that the lived experience of moral commitment is a way of life, or process, which typically includes: (1) becoming aware of the needs of others and (2) either feeling compelled or choosing to serve others as an extension of earlier life experiences, compassion for others and beliefs in God and justice. This process can reflect an

autobiographical motif, or pattern of themes, in the life of the morally committed person. Moral commitment is accompanied by passionate feelings and inner conflicts, yet its exercise provides personal growth and psychic rewards which can act as motivation for continued commitment and service to others. For many, the desire to make a difference in the lives of others or in society reflects a partnership relationship with God, enacted through service to those in need, suffering or unjustly oppressed. Intention to make a difference was paramount, and participants continued to serve regardless of the outcome of their service.

Findings reflect that the morally committed of both genders act from an ethic combining compassion, care and responsibility for others, and concerns for justice, individual rights and community welfare. Participants' lives reveal that neither traumatic life experiences nor abusive family backgrounds preclude the development and enactment of moral commitment, and, in fact, may compel persons to serve others in a selfless manner.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

**Eleanor and Clifton West, my parents, who instilled in me
a desire to learn and the eagerness to persevere and
achieve, without which this endeavor would
not have been attempted;**

**Paul MacRenato, my son, who from a distance encouraged
me to continue on, especially during the hard times;**

and,

**Anita MacRenato, my daughter, whose pride in her mother
motivated me, whose love and memory sustained me
and whose joy I will share again one day.**

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I thank my dissertation committee for their guidance and encouragement during my efforts leading to the completion of this dissertation: Dr. Mary Scherr, for her enthusiasm about my topic, her careful analysis and discussion of each draft, and her guidance during the entire doctoral process; Dr. Steven Gelb, for his support and his critical review and analysis of the drafts; and, Dr. Kathleen Heinrich for her constant and valued reflection of the "big picture" and for her warm support and recommendations, especially during the critical phases of data analysis and synthesis.

I also acknowledge Rev. Dr. Thomas McPhatter, whose unwavering belief in justice which he exhibited throughout his life in service to others inspired me to explore in depth the phenomenon of moral commitment; Dr. William Foster, whose provocative teaching of ethics and moral philosophy influenced my dissertation topic; Carmen Samuels, Dr. Elaine Parent, Adele Wilson and Barbara Wesser for their friendship, insights and support during my doctoral pursuits; my colleagues at the University of California, San Diego, for their support and tolerance, especially Nicole Moran-O'Neil and Marva Whitehead Nash; and, the caring and committed men and women who enriched my life by opening their lives, hearts and private thoughts to me during the course of this study.

And finally, thank you, Captain, for your lifeline of love, patience and encouragement as I guided this ship into port after its long journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
CHAPTER ONE	1
Statement of the Issue	1
Introduction	1
Focus of the Study	2
Purpose and Significance of the Study	3
Rationale for the Study	4
Chapter Organization	6
CHAPTER TWO	8
Review of the Literature	8
Introduction	8
Morality	9
Moral Development	9
Moral Virtue and Moral Action	12
Commitment	14
Personal Commitment	15
Moral Commitment	17
Summary	22
CHAPTER THREE	24

Research Design and Methodology	24
Introduction	24
Overview of Phenomenology	24
The Phenomenological Method	26
Research Design	28
Pilot Study	28
Researcher Preparation	30
Research Participants	31
Selection Criteria	31
Selection of Participants	32
Characteristics of the Final	
Participant Sample	33
Initial Contact	34
Data Collection	35
Data Analysis	36
Introduction	36
Analytical Steps	38
CHAPTER FOUR	39
Participant Profiles	39
Introduction	39
Eddie	39
Jerry	42
Brenda	44
Thomas	46

Benjamin	48
Jonathan	50
Sara	52
Randa	53
Truman	54
Delia	56
Summary	58
CHAPTER FIVE	59
Presentation of Findings	59
Introduction	59
Phenomenological Description of Moral	
Commitment	60
Introduction to Presentation of Themes	61
A Way of Life	62
Life Experiences and Beliefs	66
The Compelling Force and Choice of	
Commitment	74
Doing Good for God	79
Inner Conflict	83
Making a Difference	88
Making a Difference for Other	
Individuals	90
Making a Difference for Society	96
Psychic Rewards	101

Feelings	103
Personal Growth	110
Summary	116
CHAPTER SIX	117
Discussion of the Findings	117
General Discussion	117
Participant Differences	121
Discussion of Major Themes	122
A Way of Life	122
Making a Difference	127
Psychic Rewards	128
Summary	130
CHAPTER SEVEN	133
Limitations, Relationship to Previous Research,	
Researcher Recommendations and Conclusion	133
Introduction	133
Limitations of the Study	134
Relationship of Findings to Previous Research	134
Recommendations to Researchers	139
Conclusion	141
REFERENCES	143
APPENDIX	155

CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Issue

Introduction

In this study I explored through in-depth interviews the experience of moral commitment, the meanings of the experience and how adult individuals understand that experience. What experiences did individuals say were ones of moral commitment? What meanings did these experiences have for them? How did these individuals view their own moral commitment?

Moral ecology, or that network of moral meanings and commitments which draw people together in community, is potentially the basis of an ethically good society (Bellah, 1991). Individual citizens of such an ideal society would engage in practices of commitment because those endeavors are ethically good in and of themselves, as happened for a time in ancient Greece (MacIntyre, 1984). Bellah defined "practices of commitment" as those patterns of loyalty and obligation which keep a community alive (1985).

A society is known by the activities and achievements of its members. In an ethically good society, that society's ideals and values would be exemplified by morally committed citizens. To foster the creation of a morally good society and combat the excesses of individualism currently present in

American life, Bellah (1985) proposed the personal transformation of large numbers of society's members. "Personal transformation among large numbers is essential, and it must not only be a transformation of consciousness but must also involve individual action" (Bellah, 1985, p. 286). My goal in conducting this study was to bring greater understanding to the phenomenon of moral commitment embodied in individuals who displayed that commitment by selflessly serving others in society.

Focus of the Study

The writings of Bellah (1991; 1985), Etzioni (1993), Fay (1987), Foster (1986), MacIntyre (1984), Palmer (1981) and Sullivan (1986) explored the pivotal role that individuals and communities play in the creation of ethically healthy social institutions. I believe that such examination must also include studying moral commitment and what that commitment means to the individuals experiencing it. If human moral commitment and moral action are one and the same (Andrews, 1991; Blustein, 1991; Noddings, 1984), and if awareness and understanding are essential to moral action (Locke, 1993), then one cannot be committed to something without acting upon that commitment. However, there may be a continuum of moral commitment and action, leading from individual characteristics, to motivational and emotional states, and finally to action. If such is the case, the development of a theory of moral action is called for (Midlarsky, 1984; Staub, 1984). However, such theory-building was not the focus of this study, which explored the personal experiences and meanings of moral commitment as they were being lived.

This study used a phenomenological framework to gather detailed descriptions of the experience, meaning and understanding of moral commitment. A review of the literature on phenomenology as a theoretical framework and methodological approach is presented in Chapter Three. Recent literature on morality and commitment is presented in Chapter Two. The review of the literature on morality included moral development, moral virtue and moral action and the review on commitment included personal commitment and moral commitment.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the lived human experience of moral commitment. This study was significant because the findings will contribute to the body of qualitative studies of moral commitment and will aid in understanding the diverse types of moral commitment and moral action. The results may also aid in the understanding of moral commitment and action within organizational settings, as well as lead to working hypotheses for future study of moral commitment, altruism and social activism.

The purpose of the study's in-depth interviews was to understand the meaning of the lived experience of moral commitment. This purpose also served as the only research focus or question of the study. Typically, phenomenological researchers do not develop research questions as generally found in quantitative and some qualitative studies. The purpose of phenomenological research and methodology, however, is to explore the

meanings and understandings of distinct lived experiences or emotional states through in-depth interviewing and data analysis. In this study one comprehensive and provocative question was asked at the beginning of the interviews with research participants to elicit narratives about and descriptions of their experiences of moral commitment, a topic appropriate for study using a phenomenological framework.

Questions about motivations and antecedents of moral commitment, about cultural, social and psychological determinants of moral commitment, about characteristics of morally committed persons and about consequences of moral commitment were not the focus of this study. However, stories participants told about their experiences of moral commitment occasionally contained data on these concepts. These data are woven throughout the findings in Chapter Five and the discussion of findings in Chapter Six.

Rationale for the Study

There is a large body of literature on moral development, morality, altruism, empathy and other concepts which has shed light on the development of moral commitment (Bar-Tal, 1984; Callero, 1986; Cohen, 1988; Eisenberg, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Kahana, 1984; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohn, 1990; Krebs, 1992; Midlarsky, 1984, 1992; Oliner & Oliner, 1988, 1992; Puka, 1983; Rushton, 1980; Staub, 1984; Stephens, 1985; Van Hesteren, 1992; & Worchel, 1984). Some theorists and researchers have recommended engaging in non-experimental approaches to understand the phenomenon of moral behavior in real life. Bar Tal (1984), Midlarsky (1984) and Van Hesteren

(1992) urged the adoption of qualitative, naturalistic methods -- observations, interviews, surveys and content analysis -- for the study of moral commitment and moral behavior. Bar Tal suggested that moral behavior be studied as it is experienced, and not in laboratory situations, as has been frequently done.

Van Hesteren (1992) suggested using a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach which explores different aspects of human intentionality, judgment and self-consciousness in-depth. However, there have been few empirical studies of the phenomenon of moral commitment as it is experienced and lived. This study attempted to fill that gap.

Qualitative methods used in the past to study moral action and commitment have ranged from case study (Stephens, 1985), ethnomethodology (Ilsley, 1991), retrospective interviews (Andrews, 1991), autobiographies (Durr, 1985), to phenomenological approaches (Hoehn, 1983). Colby and Damon (1992) studied the lives of morally exceptional and exemplary individuals referred to them by a panel of experts (ethicists, theologians, philosophers and historians). The authors engaged in semi-structured interviews using the assisted autobiography method of case study. Interviews occurred when subjects were no longer engaged in the activities in question.

In this study I used the phenomenological approach to gather research data, to analyze data for themes, and to report themes gathered from research subjects, or participants, during in-depth interviews. In reporting research themes I described participants' experiences and understandings of moral commitment. The interviews were conducted with adults engaged in the

practice of moral commitment at the time of the interviews, not retrospectively as has been done in previous research. Most studies on moral commitment have not included descriptions, narratives or stories about the actual experience and meanings of moral commitment as it was being lived by individuals at the time of the studies. This study attempted to provide that data.

For the purpose of this study, the participants' moral commitments were defined as continuous, sustained, long-term and selfless service to others that was practiced outside their careers or places of employment. Their moral commitments were considered extraordinary by the organizations which they served. Participants' commitments constituted service above and beyond ordinary volunteerism or helping behavior. Such service included activities of voluntary service or devotion of time and/or resources to human service agencies, organizations and institutions, such as hospitals, churches, community service agencies, service organizations and schools.

Chapter Organization

The remaining chapters of this dissertation are organized as follows. Chapter Two presents the review of literature on moral commitment. That review is divided into literature on morality, including moral development and moral virtue and action, and on commitment, including personal commitment and moral commitment. Chapter Three presents the research design and the methodology used in this study. After a brief summary of phenomenology and the phenomenological method, research design is discussed. Research design

includes researcher preparation, sampling and selection, characteristics of and initial contact with research participants, data collection and data analysis. Chapter Four presents participant profiles, or brief summaries of the life stories of study participants, largely in their own words. Chapter Five presents the findings of this study. The findings include a phenomenological description of moral commitment, and the presentation of major themes derived from interview accounts with participants. Themes are explored in depth through quotes from participants. Chapter Six presents a discussion of the major themes derived from participant interviews. Chapter Seven presents the limitations of the study, the study findings' relationship to previous research on moral commitment, recommendations to researchers and a conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Kotarba wrote that "amorphous social experiences are those facets of everyday life that are unique to individuals and not specific kinds of settings" (1980, p. 57). Moral commitment is one such ambiguous, unquantifiable and complex phenomenon, understood differently by individuals and studied within various theoretical disciplines -- especially philosophy and the social sciences. The consequences and effects of moral commitment can be observed by both impartial and interested observers. However, the phenomenon of moral commitment, as experienced by the committed individual, can only be completely and fully understood by that person. In this study, narratives gathered through interviews of persons experiencing moral commitment illustrated the phenomenon and captured individual meanings.

Most reports in the literature written to this point have neglected descriptions of the understandings, meanings and actual experiences of moral commitment. This review of the literature, therefore, covers a broad range of literature in order to shed light on the two major components of moral commitment. The first section reviews research on morality, including moral development, moral action and moral virtue. The second section reviews

literature on commitment, including personal commitment and moral commitment. Literature on phenomenology is reviewed in the "Overview of Phenomenology" in Chapter Three.

Morality

Philosophers from Plato (Warmington & Rouse, 1956) and Kant (1959) to Rawls (1971) and MacIntyre (1984) have long argued the origins and nature of morality and justifications for moral actions. Some have posited that humans can reach moral judgments only through good reasons and by impartial consideration of the interests of all (Kant, 1959; Rachels, 1986; Rawls, 1971). Others have suggested that morality, or a belief system about right and wrong behavior, presupposes relationships between actors and their motives, reasons and actions (Kohlberg, 1971; Rest, 1986). Social context and experience are commonly believed necessary components of the study of morality and moral behavior (Rest, 1986). Morality does not exist in a vacuum. How does one develop morally? What is moral behavior? What precedes moral action? "Moral" is widely understood as pertaining to the rules of right or ethical conduct, and is synonymous with virtuous, just, righteous and possessing integrity (Webster, 1989).

Moral Development

Since morality cannot be studied in a psychological and social vacuum a review of human psychological and moral development theories is critical to understanding moral concepts and behavior. Attention is paid to major

theories of psychological and moral development in this review. Psychologists (Erikson, 1982; Maslow, 1954) who developed stage theories of human development and motivation form the linchpin of current moral development theories (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1976).

Maslow (1954;1962) viewed human development and motivation as a progression through a hierarchy of needs to be fulfilled, beginning with basic needs related to survival (food, shelter, safety) and developing into higher level needs related to human growth (love, self-esteem and self-actualization).

Although not a moral development theory, Erikson's epigenetic theory of human personality development -- which integrated biological, psychological and ethical concepts into the development of the human personality -- encompassed basic and higher level needs (later identified by Maslow) within his schema of the predetermined eight stages of man. In addition, Erikson's theory incorporated the view that society at large met and nourished human potentiality for complete psychological development. In particular, Erikson's seventh stage of development, generativity, included the human concern and desire to guide and care for future generations. Such generativity, the roots of which were in experiences of intimacy, love and affiliation, was the outward manifestation of the virtue of care. If successfully exercised, generativity led to personal ego integrity and mature wisdom, as well as the renewal of others within communities and of entire cultures.

Based on the cognitive development work of Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1976) conducted an empirical study of 84 boys over a twenty year period to investigate how they structured their thinking about social and moral

questions. As a result of his study of how males resolved moral dilemmas, Kohlberg developed a six stage theory of moral development within a three-level framework. The first level of preconventional morality, typical of children up to the age of nine, contained the first two stages: "Do right and avoid punishment" and "An act is right if it meets one's needs." Level two, conventional morality, was typical of most 9 to 20 year olds, who conformed to the conventional rules of society because they were the rules. Stage three and four within this level stressed conformity in order to please or impress others, and obedience to fixed rules to maintain social order. Level three, postconventional morality, was reached after 20 years and only, according to Kohlberg, by a small proportion of adults. This level was termed postconventional in that the moral principles which supported societal convention were understood. The final stages, five and six, stressed the maintenance of social order (as in stage four) and the protection of individual rights, and the adoption of self-chosen moral principles, applied universally and consistently as the basis of ethical decisions.

Gilligan (1982), after studying males and females of varying, yet matched, ages, education and occupations, offered a bifocal understanding of morality. Gilligan found that respecting the rights of others and protecting the potential for self-fulfillment tended to be viewed by males as an essential component of morality. Conversely, females tended to view caring and responsibility for others as morality's essential components. As such, no one was hurt, others were considered in decision-making processes, and attention to others was the primary motivation in the moral decision-making of women.

Moral maturity for both sexes, according to Gilligan, should encompass the ethic of care (seen earlier in Erikson) and responsibility, and the ethic of rights, justice and self-achievement (as seen in Maslow and Kohlberg). The needs and desires of all should be considered equally and justly, and no one should be hurt, but in fact cared for. Identity, then, can relate to achievement as well as to attachment, and responsibility can mean caring as well as obligation.

Jordan (1984) and Lyons (1983) added a feminist perspective to the study of moral behavior. Jordan, especially, moved from a psychology of the separate self to a psychology of self - in - relation with others. The self develops and acts in relation to others, developing mutual empathy through a cycle of experiencing trust, vulnerability, intimacy, forgiveness, rebuilt trust and renewed vulnerability. Compassion becomes a sharing of the passion or suffering of others. Responsibility becomes the empathic ability to respond to others, or response/ability to connect with others (Lyons).

Moral Virtue and Moral Action

Various authors have sought to build a connection between moral virtue and moral action. Noddings (1984) held that "to care is to act" and that the ethic of care necessitates a commitment to act. And according to Blustein (1991), the test of care is if one acts upon one's concern. Blustein contended that persons who act upon principles or beliefs, that is, act with moral integrity, display virtues, especially moral courage, which enable them to act.

Weinreich-Haste (1983) said the intervening variable between reason

and action is responsibility, yet Palmer (1981) wrote that reflection and contemplation are complementary with action and can serve to clarify our encounters with others in our public lives. Some theorists (Locke, 1983; Straughan, 1983) saw moral cognitive development as essential to moral action, yet social researchers (Colby & Damon, 1992; Cortese, 1984; Hoehn, 1983; & Oliner & Oliner, 1992) have recorded the active role played by human experiences in creating moral behavior and commitment. Social role demands, class, culture, ethnicity and just plain generosity of spirit, determined moral behavior, especially of a helping nature (Berkowitz, 1987; Cortese, 1984).

Altruism can be viewed as a special form of moral action. Cohen said altruism is an "act or desire to give something gratuitously to another person or group because he, she, they or it needs or wants it" (1978, p. 10). Cohen made no mention of reciprocity or efforts to advance one's own welfare, which Kohlberg (1976) believed to be symbolized by altruism. Most behaviorists have avoided studying altruistic motivations, norms, empathy, care and compassion, and contended that acts of altruism are culturally dependent (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). Skinner (1978) suggested that we may not really be helping others by doing things for them because our help obviates their own learning and doing for themselves.

In contrast, Cohen (1978), Eisenberg (1986), Heller (1992), Krebs (1992), Krebs & Smolenska (1992), Oliner & Oliner (1988), Staub (1984), and Van Hesteren (1992) held that foundations for altruistic behavior can be found in feelings of empathy, traditional values, and family and other early life experiences. In the most advanced stage of ideal altruism, individuals achieved

a highly integrated sense of self-identity (Van Hesteren, 1992), could be highly spiritual (Heller, 1992), and possessed an inclusive view of humanity (Oliner & Oliner, 1992). Highly altruistic persons were acutely aware of those who are oppressed in society (Andrews, 1991), felt responsible for the suffering of others (Hoehn, 1983), were deeply concerned about future generations (Erikson, 1982; Farley, 1986; & Frankfurt, 1988), and extended the self or ego beyond one's own culture or group to be inclusive of others who were different from themselves (Colby & Damon, 1992; Oliner & Oliner, 1992; & Worchel, 1984). These individuals displayed highly integrated personalities (Colby & Damon, 1992; Puka, 1983; & Rushton, 1980) and possessed strongly held core beliefs, especially in a meaning greater than the self (Colby & Damon, 1992).

These qualities, seen as essential to ideal altruism, can also be viewed as qualities possessed by individuals who display and experience outstanding moral commitment in their lives (Andrew, 1991; Berkowitz, 1987; Colby & Damon, 1992; Hoehn, 1983; & Oliner & Oliner, 1988) Such persons are discussed in the section on moral commitment.

Commitment

In this section I discuss the various definitions and understandings of commitment from a philosophical perspective, then review studies, mainly qualitative, on personal and moral commitment.

Some philosophers, moralists and social scientists defined commitment as long-term life goals derived from practical reasoning (Walton, 1986), or as an expression of deliberative priority about which one cares (Blustein, 1991).

Farley (1986) added a moral dimension and defined commitment as a reflection of generosity of spirit and investment in future generations. Farley, however, reported that many philosophers believed human beings are not capable of long term commitments because human freedom does not have the power to control the future and that humans change too much in one lifetime to maintain long term commitments. Scott (1971) expanded upon that interpretation when he contended that moral commitment depends on reinforcement from the social environment and changes as the environment changes. Whether one agrees with the absolutist philosopher or with those who believe moral commitment is possible and real, there is scant theoretical and empirical work on moral commitment. These gaps make the phenomenon worthy of further study.

Personal Commitment

Brickman (1987) and Gerlach and Hine (1970) have developed stage theories about the process of commitment. Brickman held that the nature of commitment is determined by the ambivalence and the bond between the positive (joy, utility) and the negative (sacrifice, danger). His stages progressed from unreflective exploration and encountering of external forces, to stages of synthesis of positive and negative elements recognized as the process of commitment, internal orientation, and integration of positive and negative elements.

Gerlach and Hine (1970) studied movements of social transformation in which the movements' members were personally transformed by their

experiences of commitment, which tended to transform society as well. Their stage process of commitment involved initial contact with and demonstration of change by a participant in a social or other group movement. Re-education through group interaction led to a decision and surrender to that movement, the commitment itself and ultimate testimony about and group support for the new members' changed cognitive and behavioral patterns. Strong convictions generated an impervious sense of commitment to the movement, cause or person.

Although not a stage theory of commitment, Mezirow's ten step personal perspective transformation process is relevant to this discussion. According to Mezirow (1990), perspective transformation is:

The process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. More inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspectives are superior perspectives that adults choose if they can because they are motivated to better understand the meaning of their experience. (p. 14)

Coffman (1991) rejected Mezirow's cognitive-rational approach to perspective transformation in favor of a social-interactive explanation for why individuals re-examine and explore values, behavior and roles. Coffman's

revisions of Mezirow's perspective transformation process included exposure to a disorienting dilemma, with attendant and intense feelings of surprise, elation or confusion. Intense awareness of and interaction with others about this new reality forced a personal and critical re-examination and exploration of social norms and values. A course of action was planned, and new knowledge and skills were acquired before trying on new roles. Finally, acceptance of the new role and reintegration into society followed based on one's new perspective.

Similarly, Greene (1990) asserted that ethical commitments which arise from social dialogue over values and norms must be marked by passion and attentiveness to new possibilities. Although core commitments may order and shape lives through judgment and wisdom (Blustein, 1991), courage may be required to live lives of coherent commitment to that which one holds to be good, primary or carrying meaning only found in some final end (Blustein, 1991; Walton, 1991).

Moral Commitment

Although much psychological research on altruism, moral development and prosocial helping behavior has been conducted in controlled laboratory or field experiments (Eisenberg, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1976; & Staub, 1984), little has been conducted in natural, realistic settings, via ethnographies, case studies or phenomenological interviews.

Recollections through assisted autobiographies of moral exemplars (Colby & Damon, 1992), phenomenological interviews exploring the antecedents of social involvement (Hoehn, 1983), structured interviews about

rescuing behavior and its causes (Oliner & Oliner, 1988), interviews of the elderly about their political beliefs (Andrews, 1991), case studies of the antecedents of lives of service (Stephens, 1985), ethnomethodological studies of social activists (Ilsley, 1991), and interviews of middle aged volunteers (Berkowitz, 1987) have contributed to a greater understanding of the causes and conditions of social and moral involvement. These studies served, however, to point out gaps in the literature on the understanding and meaning of the phenomenon of moral commitment as experienced and described by individuals. I discuss, now, specific research which served as background and rationale for this study.

Colby and Damon's (1992) qualitative work was an in-depth study of contemporary lives of moral commitment. Their analysis was mainly qualitative, although some quantitative analysis using ANOVA was employed. Colby and Damon charged a panel of nominators (expert ethicists, philosophers, social scientists, historians and theologians) with the task of developing criteria for and selecting approximately 20 "moral exemplars" who were then interviewed by the researchers using the assisted autobiography method of case study. The purpose of their study was to explore the origins and exercise of moral commitment, collect descriptions, gather commonalities, suggest developmental principles and generate hypotheses about the causes of moral commitment and how it develops over time.

The interviewees, aged 35 to 86 (with the majority in their late 60's or older), were chosen using five criteria: Sustained commitment to moral ideals, disposition to act on that commitment, risk of one's self-interest, serving as

inspiration for others, and exhibiting humility. Interviews were conducted to explore values, goals, world views, life assumptions, life history, critical events, religious influences and specific experiences. Most of the work done by the interviewees was in the areas of healing, education, medicine, the environment, peace, helping the poor and needy, and business ethics.

The moral exemplars were found to be collaborative, joyous, charitable, spontaneous, extensive, possessed unremitting faith, did not consider personal risk or consequences in their actions, showed personal excellence in their contributions and a progressive unity of self and morality. Commitment to truth, justice, charity, peace, growth, change and transformation guided their paths through the challenges inherent in their experiences of commitment.

Although Colby and Damon's work served to enlighten those who aim to study moral commitment and its determinants, their retrospective interviews did not describe or interpret the moral exemplars' experiences as they were being acted out, which I did in this study.

Hoehn (1983) studied 87 males and females aged 19 to 94, from varying backgrounds and from different occupational fields (from engineers to ministers), to explore experiences which led to social involvement. Hoehn contended that the moral life is messy, ambiguous, complex, dynamic and unfolding, and used the phenomenological method as a way to unlock the inner moral lives, experiences and consciousnesses of those studied. Experiences which led to moral involvement included awakenings to the plight of others, racial or other discrimination, and the experiencing of bonds with others through some kind of ordeal. Ethics of sociality and engagement were

considered common among those interviewed, as were public and private conversations or discussions which helped to codify stories of moral involvement. Hoehn concluded that his findings may not reveal why persons become socially or morally involved, and mainly served to report memories. Again, the purpose of this study was to examine the actual experience of moral commitment in order to lend greater understanding to the phenomenon as it was currently being lived, not merely to study its antecedents or consequences discovered through retrospective interviews.

Oliner and Oliner (1988) recounted the rescuing of thousands of European Jews during World War II by 682 non-Jewish Europeans and studied the impulses which caused this remarkable altruistic, sacrificial behavior by persons mostly unknown to those who were rescued. It was clear from their findings that sentiments of caring and compassion were not enough to explain the rescuing behaviors and the level of risk, considering that many others cared but did not take the same risks as the rescuers.

What emerged in the accounts was the centrality of the rescuers' general attachment to and inclusive view of humanity. Empathy, feelings of obligation to help those in need, universal principles of justice and freedom, values of caring learned from non-punishing parents, connection to something larger than the self, and extensivity were the hallmarks of these rescuers. Oliner and Oliner (1988) described extensivity as a strong "sense of attachment to others and feelings of responsibility for the welfare of others, including those outside immediate familial or communal circles" (p. 249).

In contrast to the sacrificial behavior studied by Oliner and Oliner

(1988), Berkowitz (1987) and Andrews (1991) studied the lives of persons committed to social service and justice. Through interviews, Berkowitz chronicled the lives and motivations of middle-aged volunteers in social service and community development work. He found a wide variety of background and educational levels, yet similarities of influences in the lives of the volunteers. Transmission of altruism through parental influence, strong religious convictions, anger over social injustice, and traditional virtues of hope and the golden rule emerged as common themes.

Andrews explored ways political belief was developed and sustained throughout a lifetime by studying fifteen British White men and women from 70 to 90 years of age who had dedicated their lifetimes to social change and justice. Through retrospective interviews Andrews concluded that elements essential to the concept of commitment were intention as a bridge between the past, present and future, "synchronicity" between belief and action, critical life experiences and the integral part that commitment played in their daily lives as a motivating force behind life decisions. Quotes taken from interviews included "it is my joy," "it's the right thing to do," "it has a claim on me," and "integrity demands action."

Stephens (1985) used the case study approach to study 32 older adults engaged in lives of service and to determine life patterns and determinants of their altruistic behavior. Stephens found common antecedents in the adult altruists to be life events, role models, personal qualities, social position and church membership. Kahana (1984) also found that common contributing factors to helping behavior in older adults were humanistic and altruistic

motives. And in a four year ethnomethodological study of activists, Ilsley (1991) found that focal points of commitment tended to cluster around four groupings: commitment to self, commitment to an organization, commitment to others and commitment to a social mission. A deeper understanding of the meaning of commitment revealed such values as peace, justice, equality, religion, fellowship, social reform, learning and health.

Summary

It is clear from the review of literature on moral commitment that certain psychological, social and cultural antecedents of the phenomenon were found to exist in the lives of those deemed to be morally committed individuals. Psychological antecedents of moral commitment and action included empathy, altruism, extensivity, perspective transformation, beliefs, personality characteristics, moral maturity, belief in the virtues of justice, care, goodness and courage, feelings of obligation and duty, sensitivity, generosity of spirit and a concern for future generations, or generativity.

Social antecedents included significant life events, class membership, socialization, relationship ties, modelled behavior, exposure to a diversity of people and cultures, education level, social roles and demands, family values and traditions, and participation in or exposure to past moral action. Cultural antecedents included cultural norms, religious beliefs, political ideologies, other belief systems, race or ethnicity and the importance of the larger community as a target of moral commitment and action.

Some scholars who have studied moral commitment used

phenomenology as a research methodology (Colby & Damon, 1992; Hoehn, 1983). However, they focused mainly on the antecedents of moral commitment, as did Berkowitz (1987), Stephens (1985) and Kahana (1984). Other researchers studied experiences and patterns of moral commitment and the connection between moral belief and moral action, yet either studied only elderly subjects (Kahana, 1984; Stephens, 1985), or conducted retrospective interviews (Andrews, 1991; Colby & Damon, 1992; Oliner & Oliner, 1988) about the subjects' experiences of moral commitment.

This study is distinguished from previous research in that its focus was the phenomenological study of moral commitment as currently experienced by participants of varying ages. Much has already been written on the antecedents of moral behavior and moral commitment. Therefore, I attempted to fill the gaps in the literature by describing experiences of moral commitment by relaying the meaning of moral commitment for participants and by determining a structural description of the phenomenon of moral commitment.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Since the purpose of this study was to gain greater understanding of moral commitment and its meaning, the questions I posed were best answered using a qualitative method. Qualitative methods facilitate the understanding of individuals' language, actions, feelings, motivations, judgments and beliefs, and the meaning individuals give to such subjective experiences. "Social purposes and social phenomena are too complex for social science to provide definitive answers to practical problems" (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 152). Thus, qualitative methods provide a means for uncovering unquantifiable data about people and expand the range of interpretation of human behavior (Donmoyer, 1990).

The goal of qualitative data analysis is the understanding of individuals' life experiences. To reach such understanding I utilized phenomenology as a methodology for gathering, analyzing and reporting the subjective experiences of moral commitment and their meaning for adult individuals.

Overview of Phenomenology

Phenomenology, as seen in social science research, is generally

considered to be the reflective study of human experience and its subjective meaning. The origins of phenomenology reside, however, in philosophy, with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) widely cited as the founder or father of phenomenology.

Husserl's descriptive/reflective philosophy aimed to apply rigorous and unbiased study to "things" as they are perceived by people (1969). Such study of things would lead to the essential understanding of human consciousness through observing the stream of that consciousness. Consciousness, then, is always consciousness of something and as such recognizes and creates meanings of what the consciousness experiences (Von Eckartsberg, 1986).

The life-world, or the world as perceived and lived by persons, is the source of the experience of which consciousness is aware (Husserl, 1969). The life-world is not merely a creation or construction of consciousness, but is co-created in a dialogue of the person and the world. Heidegger (1972) termed this dialogue "being in the world," and Merleau-Ponty (1962) referred to "body-subject" in reference to Husserl's notion of the life-world. The life-world is a place of interaction between a person, and his or her perceptual environment and world of experience (Von Eckartsberg, 1986).

Schutz (1967) was more concerned with humans' constructions of social reality than Husserl, who was more concerned with the construction of reality in general. Schutz led phenomenology toward the exploration of human encounter and social interaction. Motivations of individuals and groups were studied and the life-world was thematized and typified. Schutz found reality difficult to explain unless grounded in the meanings constructed and attached

to everyday life by individuals. He advocated the study of "social behavior by interpreting its subjective meaning as found in the intentions of individuals in the social world and the ways in which individuals give meaning to social phenomena" (1967, p. 11).

Existential phenomenology emerged in the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Existential phenomenology emphasized that "being in the world involves more than human consciousness and encompasses the total embodied human response to perceived situations" (Von Eckartsberg, 1986). Adherents of this philosophy study existence in terms of human involvement in situations within the world.

Heidegger (1972) believed that being-in-the-world meant being grounded in care, or living with a concerned openness to the world and to others, an approach he called the hermeneutics of existence. His view of human existence was transpersonal in the sense that we are all creators of our social world, not merely passive beings, but active participants in the world. Human experience, then, is a reality that results from the openness of human awareness to the world (Polkinghorne, 1989).

The Phenomenological Method

Phenomenology as a research framework and methodology evolved throughout this century to become a qualitative approach which studies the meaning of human experiences as they occur in everyday life. Such study is accomplished by gathering rich descriptive accounts of research subjects' or participants' feelings about and memories of actual lived experiences (Bogdan

& Taylor, 1975; Giorgi, 1976; Seidman, 1991). Researchers using the phenomenological approach probe human experience to reveal the complexity of individual perceptions and understanding (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Tesch, 1984) and are committed to understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Through reflective study of essential themes discerned in descriptive accounts of experience, researchers are able to explicate the meaning of the phenomena of human consciousness and lived experience (Von Eckartsberg, 1986).

In this study I used empirical phenomenology as a theoretical base and a methodological approach. Tesch (1990) described empirical phenomenology as the systematic investigation of and the understanding of the psychological meaning of subjective human experiences. What is the world like for humans? How can we best understand their experiences? Experiences of being angry, homeless, or guilty, and other human feelings and experiences, are typical topics studied by empirical phenomenologists. Concrete descriptions of such lived experiences are then analyzed to arrive at the general structure of the experiences. The structure discerned by the phenomenological researcher takes the form of a prototypical description of the lived phenomenon being studied (Tesch, 1984).

General questions which guide phenomenological research include: "What is the essence of a phenomenon?" and "What is that phenomenon essentially?" (Von Eckartsberg, 1986). Tesch (1984) divided these general questions into three specific focuses for phenomenological study:

1. Questions about basic inner processes experienced by everyone, such

as anger, love and shame.

2. Questions about experiences believed to be important sociological and psychological phenomena of our time, such as being an alcoholic or being a cancer patient.

3. Questions about changes and transitions which are common or important to humans, such as becoming a parent, growing old and getting divorced.

My exploration of the topic in this study addressed the second focus described by Tesch. What is moral commitment? What does it mean to be a morally committed person? What is the experience of moral commitment like for those individuals?

Research Design

The Pilot Study

Prior to my main research, I conducted a pilot study with two persons, one male and one female, known to me through mutual community activities. These persons were known by me and others to exhibit extraordinary commitments to community affairs, and to persons and groups in need. The purpose of conducting the pilot study was fivefold: to test the appropriateness of various interview questions; to refine my interviewing skills; to gain experience in the phenomenological method of eliciting data from interviewees; to practice phenomenological data analysis; and to aid in choosing one, comprehensive question with which to begin interviews with the study's final participant sample.

I interviewed and audiotaped each of the pilot study participants for approximately 100 minutes. Questions asked during interviews ranged from direct to open-ended. I asked questions relating to their experiences of helping others, their motivations for service and their feelings about their service to others. I also asked many clarification questions, the answers to which aided me in understanding their previous responses. I occasionally asked for additional descriptions or examples of their understandings of their service to others. I transcribed the taped interview accounts and analyzed them for content. This practice analysis afforded me the opportunity to isolate units of meaning and themes from the interviews. I grouped themes into clusters of themes, and presented the transcriptions and the analyses to the pilot interviewees for review and discussion.

As a result of the pilot study I revised the interview protocol. I eliminated direct questions and determined that in the research study I would ask each participant only one, comprehensive question at the beginning of the interview. That one question would require that participants reflect on a specific experience or experiences and their meaning. I determined that any other questions to be asked during participant interviews would serve the purpose of encouraging participants to reflect on experiences and their meaning, or would serve to clarify for me what participants said. I also determined that 100 minutes was more than enough time for each interview. Pilot interviewees enjoyed the interview experiences and wanted to talk longer than I later determined was necessary to elicit stories about their experiences. As a result, I decided to attempt to limit the study's participant interviews to

45 to 60 minutes.

Researcher Preparation

The purpose of data gathering in phenomenological research is to produce clear, precise and systematic descriptions of the meaning of human lived experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). A general format for arriving at these descriptions is typically followed by phenomenological researchers. The research process begins with the researcher acknowledging his or her biases, preconceived ideas and assumptions about the phenomenon to be studied (Valle, 1989). Researchers make any assumptions and biases explicit through personal reflection about the phenomenon. The researcher acknowledges that these biases do exist and, before beginning any research, sets aside such biases in an effort to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants, and not from his or her own perspective.

Since I had chosen the phenomenon of moral commitment as a research topic one year prior to beginning data collection, I had ample time to reflect upon and acknowledge my own assumptions, biases and preconceived ideas about moral commitment. Through this reflection I determined that I did hold certain assumptions about moral commitment, including:

1. The belief that moral commitment is totally selfless and that no reward or reciprocal action is expected, needed or wanted as a result of acts of moral commitment.
2. The assumption that morally committed persons are not conflicted about their commitments, and that their moral commitments do not compete

with other aspects of their lives.

3. The bias that moral commitment is somehow related to or springs from religious faith.

4. The assumption that moral commitment is "serious business," and not much fun, and in fact is sacrificial in nature.

5. The belief that morally committed individuals are good persons, are mostly highly educated and engaged in professional careers.

After uncovering and acknowledging my assumptions and biases about moral commitment, I was prepared to engage in non-directive, in-depth interviews with participants about their experiences. During the interviews, "here and now" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) constructions of persons, experiences, feelings, motivations and events would emerge. Since the participants were viewed as the experts (Tesch, 1990) on the phenomenon of moral commitment, I planned to encourage them to thoroughly describe what it was like to experience moral commitment. Thus, these interviews would, and did, become an intense immersion in the phenomenon for me and for the participants.

Research Participants

Selection Criteria. I established the following criteria for potential participants:

1. Participants would demonstrate sustained dedication or sacrifice of time and/or other resources apart from their regular personal, family and work lives for service to others. "Sustained" was defined for the purpose of this study as at least three years of continuous, selfless service to others apart

from career or place of employment.

2. Participants would demonstrate a tendency, perceived by persons referring participants to me, to be inspiring to others and thereby to move others to engage in similar selfless service.

3. Participants would be 25 years of age or more to ensure that they had volunteered for at least three years as adults.

Selection of Participants. Qualitative inquiry often focuses on relatively small samples, selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). This is especially true for phenomenological inquiry. The rationale behind purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases or participants for study in depth. This sampling method begins by asking persons who are knowledgeable about and have exposure to the type of individual needed as a study participant. By asking a number of such persons for recommendations, the researcher gathers useful information about possible participants who may be of special interest and suitable as research subjects.

To find research participants for this study, I contacted professional staff from a variety of human service organizations and institutions in a large, multi-ethnic city in a southwestern state. The human service organizations were those which met various human needs, such as health, education, shelter, counseling, and spiritual guidance. Examples of such organizations were hospitals, churches, the YWCA, the American Red Cross, the United Way and Habitat for Humanity. I spoke with the organizations' professional staff who were familiar with the work of their organization's volunteers and I explained

the selection criteria to those staff persons. Organizational professionals then identified and recommended to me organizational volunteers who met the criteria for this study. I selected ten of the persons recommended to me by organization staff for interviews. Throughout the study I maintained the option of interviewing more than ten persons if that number did not provide for thematic saturation during data analysis, which was conducted concurrently with data gathering. It did not become necessary to interview more than ten persons, as thematic saturation was reached.

Characteristics of the Final Participant Sample. There were ten participants in this study, ranging in age from 33 to 78 years. Four were female, ranging in age from 33 to 65 years, and six were male, ranging in age from 33 to 78 years. All but one, an African American male of 67 years, were European American. One female was Jewish. Eight participants considered themselves to be somewhat or very devout in their religious faith and beliefs. Three participants described their backgrounds as fundamentalist Christian. All participants, except two, had children, and all, except one, were either married or had been married. Three participants completed high school, and five participants completed some college courses, but had not graduated from college. One participant completed a college degree and one participant completed a doctoral degree. Participants' occupations included entertainer, housewife, professor emeritus, construction worker, retired carpenter, business owner, retired accountant, retired secretary and community development worker. The organizations for which the participants volunteered included

churches, hospices, a homeless shelter, the USO, schools, human rights organizations, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and neighborhood community service agencies. Nine participants were involved in activities which directly served other human beings, activities which brought them into close contact with others. One participant served through an organization which only worked indirectly to help others.

Initial Contact. Once potential participants were recommended by organizational professionals, I contacted participants by phone. I informed them about how I acquired their names, and then told them about the purpose and scope of this research study - - an exploration of the experience and meaning of moral commitment. I also explained the duration of their participation in the study (no more than two interviews), and explained any risks and benefits they might experience. I assured prospective participants that all data gathered would be kept confidential and that their anonymity would be maintained.

All persons whom I contacted agreed to be study participants. On the day of the interview with each participant, I presented to each an informed consent form for their perusal and signature (refer to Appendix for consent form). Closely following guidelines established by the Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects, I explained to each participant his or her rights as a research subject, including the option to withdraw from the study at any time, and that their anonymity would be protected (refer to Appendix for

approval by the Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects). After my explanation, each participant signed the consent form agreeing to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Each interview was conducted in a quiet environment, convenient for each participant and of the participant's choosing. All interviews were conducted either in their home, place of employment or in the community site where they spent time volunteering.

Before beginning each interview, I gained basic demographic information from each participant, such as age, ethnicity, education level, occupation, marital and family status. I explained to each participant that their goal in the interview was to reconstruct the concrete details of his or her experiences of moral commitment and to reflect on the meaning of those experiences. I began each interview with an open-ended question that encouraged free association by the participant: "Could you tell me a story about your experiences with this organization or persons you are helping, a story which conveys what it means to you to be of service to others?"

Any remaining questions on my part emerged as the interviews progressed and served to clarify participant answers, or encouraged participants to share more of their experiences. Such questions included: "What does that mean to you?" "Could you tell me more about that experience?" "Can you give me another illustration of that?" "Tell me more about what that means to you." "Could you help me understand what that

means to you?" This form of interviewing allowed me to comprehend as fully as possible the meaning of participants' experiences and feelings.

Each participant was interviewed one time. Interviews ranged in duration from 45 to 90 minutes and averaged 60 minutes. All interviews were audiotaped by me for the purpose of later transcription. I transcribed each interview within one month of the interview. I then sent each participant a written transcription of their interview for review and possible correction. Some participants returned the transcripts to me, corrected and with comments, and other participants phoned me with their corrections and comments. After they had read the transcripts, I had phone conversations with participants to clarify for myself and for them that the themes which I elicited during my preliminary thematic analysis of the transcripts were, in fact, clear, true and meaningful for the participants. I also asked them if there was anything else they wanted to add to their interview responses. Most were satisfied with my thematic analysis, some clarified certain points and quotations, and one participant sent me some printed material which helped to clarify for me her understanding of spirituality and commitment. One participant requested that he not be quoted in the study, but merely paraphrased.

Data Analysis

Introduction. Data analysis is the process of identifying themes or constructing summaries as suggested by the interview data (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). The actual steps for arriving at the final composite description of a

phenomenon is detailed and the process is rigorous. Tesch (1990) summarized the steps used by Colaizzi (1978) and Giorgi (1975) in phenomenological data analysis. First, the researcher reads the transcripts of all interviews with participants several times. Immersion in these data is critical for achieving a sense of the whole experience as described by each participant. Second, the researcher delineates all units of meaning that pertain to the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1975) and decides which units are relevant to the research questions being studied (Colaizzi, 1978).

Third, the theme of each meaning unit is restated or transformed into more abstract or professional language and units are clustered together. Fourth, the non-redundant themes from interviews are combined into a descriptive statement (Giorgi, 1975). Finally, a general description is obtained after exhaustive comparison of all individual descriptions. This final description becomes the fundamental structure of the phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978).

One goal of phenomenological data analysis is to find common themes within the interview data. Procedures for developing themes vary from researcher to researcher. Colaizzi (1978) urged examination of all participants' descriptions together for common themes. Combination of meaning units derived in this manner form the structural definition or description of the phenomenon under study. Giorgi (1975) stressed revealing context-related themes or meaning units from individual interviews or protocols first, then developing a description at the general level. Patton (1980) advocated a description of patterns and themes, Hycner (1985) sought a "composite

summary," and Lofland (1971) wrote of a "final order."

Analytical Steps. In this study I followed the analytical steps outlined by Colaizzi (1978) to identify the fundamental structure of the phenomenon of moral commitment. These steps included:

1. Reading all the interview transcripts to acquire a sense or feeling for them and for the interview as a whole.
2. Extracting phrases and sentences which directly pertain to the experience and understanding of moral commitment.
3. Transforming these phrases and sentences into units of meaning or themes.
4. Listing all themes and meaning units.
5. Clustering individual themes to produce general themes and descriptions common to most or all of the participants' interviews.
6. Determining a statement which serves as the structural description of the phenomenon of moral commitment.

In addition to reporting the structural description of the phenomenon of moral commitment in Chapter Five, I also illustrate the structure of moral commitment and various themes from interviews with particular descriptions, details and stories. In those illustrations I provide concrete examples of lived experiences of moral commitment by using the participants' own words. Such examples served to build understanding of the meaning of the experiences for the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Participant Profiles

Introduction

In this chapter I present profiles of study participants in order to set the stage for later thematic presentation and discussion in Chapters Five and Six, hoping that the reader will have a deeper appreciation of the discussion of themes once the profiles have been read. These profiles are brief summaries of the participants' life stories, mostly in their own words. The profiles blend background details about their lives and the evolution of their service to others with illustrations of how they are displaying their moral commitments in the present. Phenomenological methodology does not require that such life stories be presented along with the general description of the phenomenon under study. However, most of these profiles are compelling and vivid, exhibiting participants' reactions to early life experiences, parental influence, personal beliefs and, for some, traumatic events in their lives, and how those influences affected participants' current enactments of moral commitment.

Eddie

Eddie is a 67 year old African American, born and raised in Texas. He is married, and has three grown children and many grandchildren. Eddie

completed the seventh grade by the time he entered the Army at age 17, and ultimately received a high school diploma at the age of 31. He is retired from the military where he served two years in the Army and 20 years in the Marine Corps, and is also retired from the carpenter's union after 24 years of work. Eddie has volunteered at least 40 hours per week for the last eight years in a low-income, neighborhood social service agency. His "job" in the agency is to manage a food bank for the poor in the community. He also informally works with and counsels inner city gang members:

I am a Texan and where I came from people were very poor. We lived by the railroad tracks and had our farm about two miles from the track. My mother would cook beans, cabbage, corn bread and leave them in her house for what we called hobos in those days, people transferring from one place to another on a train. We never locked our house, we kept the house open and the hobos would come into our home and get the food. They would cut our wood and keep everything as it was when they came, they never stole anything. We had a battery radio, and it stayed there for years. No one ever took it. My mother was very religious, and she would tell me it was always good and you would be blessed by helping other people. I grew up like that and I believe that to this day. . . .

Everyone should do something for someone else. I show these here gang members love. I talk to them and I let them know that I am poor and that I am doing somethin' for them, and they can do somethin' for someone else. If it's just teaching their kids my way of life. I never had any jail records. Teaching them to be honest, that's the main thing. . . . I

hug and kiss these gang members here, Gus and Will. They are pure old gang members, killers! I kiss them and hug them and grab them around the neck and hug them like this. The price is worth it. That is the way I contact people by telling them I love them and by letting them know that I love them. . . . I have a reading class in my home every Monday where white women like you, with education, come in and teach little kids three and four years old. I can't teach 'em, I can't see. But I have white women come to my house to teach 'em. Let's have thousands and thousands of houses like that and then kids would not grow up hating whitey. They would grow up loving them. . . . It can be anything you want to name it, but it's got to be love. People have forgotten what love is (tears stream down his face). I can see your reaction to what I am saying and I can see the sadness in your heart because we may never accomplish any of this. . . . I would like you to help me with my program. I think that you seem to be interested. This is the only way it's going to work, if it touches people.

During the interview, Eddie directed some additional comments to me when he said, "I wish I had someone who was capable of promoting all the ideas I have. Someone that can see and put all this on paper and sell it to the American public and the government. Good job for you. Don't laugh." After the tape recorder was turned off, Eddie encouraged me further to use whatever resources and contacts I might have in the academic world to help him with his cause of teaching his "mother wit" and way of life to people in the inner city. During and after the interview, I felt that I was under active recruitment by

this man. His arguments were very persuasive. I sympathized with his concerns and wanted to help him, but left the interview site feeling torn between humanitarian instincts and the need to conduct this research in an independent manner without any conflict of interest perceived by me or others. To this point, I have not contacted him about his request for help.

Jerry

Jerry is a 33 year old, married European American, with five children. He was born in Oklahoma, graduated from high school and owns a business which provides clowns, jugglers, musicians and mimes for events and organizations. He frequently dresses in clown costume and visits hospitals and civic organizations to entertain. Jerry has also volunteered his time for the past three years in church work. Jerry is married to Brenda, another of this study's participants:

Brenda and I are both recovering alcoholics and drug addicts and are active in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and NA (Narcotics Anonymous) recovery programs. She and I have been active in the service aspect of recovery for ten years and that involves everything from helping drive people to meetings, helping committee chairs run dances, etc. But AA and NA recovery programs are really spiritual programs. There's a lot of soul searching about who your God is and what God is and how to connect with Him . . . I still sponsor a couple of people and every once in a while I am asked to speak. I became actively involved in the church about three years ago. Brenda was born and raised a Catholic and I

really didn't have a church affiliation, though I always had a strong connection, a spiritual calling. Three years ago, I decided to find out about the church and became active again. . . . Years and years ago when my main service and my life revolved around recovery, a guy came up to me whom I didn't know and didn't recognize. He told me that I had changed his life. He said he was at a meeting the year before and I had walked over and put my hand on his shoulder, didn't say anything, but just looked at him. I could tell he was hurting and I just put my hand on his shoulder to let him know that it was going to be OK. Something about that encounter gave him hope and he remained clean after that. So he came back a year later to thank me for that gesture. . . . Another thing happened recently when I was in full clown costume, garish and bizarre for sure, in a hospital lobby on the way to cheer up some children. My sponsors were talking among themselves and I noticed a lady in the lobby who was obviously in pain. Someone was dying or had just died and she was on the verge of tears. I was not going to make her feel better by honking a horn or doing a magic trick, and I wanted to do something. So I just stood there for a minute. Then I walked over to her, never said a word, and gave her a hug. And we stood there and hugged for a long time. She cried and we hugged and when it was done, she said "thank you" and I said "God bless you" to her. We never communicated other than that. If I can be there to give someone a hug. Touch is a powerful tool. Through my experiences I know that 99% of the time touch is OK if you are sincere with it. So I have allowed myself

to use touch in a lot of areas where other people would not. It's because I know how to use that tool, it's natural for me. When I gave her that hug, it felt so right. There was an exchange of energy and emotions. Without saying a word, I was telling her it's OK to feel, to hurt. All those feelings you try to put into words. Words are not enough.

Brenda

Brenda is a 36 year old, Polish and Irish American, married with five children aged 5 months to nine years. She is married to Jerry, another participant in this study. Brenda graduated from high school and has taken enough college courses to complete a bachelor's degree, but did not graduate from college. She is a housewife, occasionally assisting Jerry with the entertainment business, sometimes working as a clown or elf. Brenda has been active in church work for over three years, and in Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) for 12 years. She teaches religious education classes to school children through a local Catholic church, is room mother for her son's class at the local elementary school, and is active in church activities and church leadership:

One of the reasons I teach second grade religious education at our church is because I really love children, especially those who aren't getting much knowledge of God and living a Christian life-style. Bringing God into our lives is the main motivator of doing everything I do. I try to live by Christian principles. I was raised Catholic. My mother died when I was young, in my early twenties. And I had a really bad

depression and decided to deal with that by abusing alcohol and drugs. I would end up very depressed and in the hospital on an attempted suicide. At that time I realized I had a lot of anger at God and at my mother for leaving me, all the things you go through when someone close to you dies. And so I got involved in the Twelve Step program of NA and AA. I started going back to church and building my relationship with God over again. I spent a lot of time in NA doing service work, on the hotline, working entertainment committees and trying to bring everybody together as a community. My husband and I pretty much started the NA program in this city. Part of the program is that you give back what you were given. One of the things I always wanted to do was teach religious education to children because when I was growing up I was taught this real punishing God. I really enjoy it and it's the most powerful thing I do in my life. . . . I am the one to be of service, not the one to call for help. The few times I have had to call for help are the best examples of when values were taught to me by example. We had a bomb blow up in our house in 1976. It was a turning point in my family's life. My mother lost hope, became seriously ill after that and died a few years later. She blamed my brother who had brought in the bomb. It was the destruction of our family in a way. I will never forget the neighbors who watched our house all night long so that reporters could not come in to film where it exploded. They stood vigil and came in and cleaned all the blood off the walls. That is community in action and that was one of the first major events in my life. It reminded me of the

fifties and when my parents were growing up. People knew each other, had block parties, joined the PTA. . . . One of my main motivations now is my children. I want them to be raised with a sense of community responsibility, a strong relationship with God. And you can't learn that from a book, you have to learn that by example.

Thomas

Thomas is a 42 year old, single European American with two years of junior college education and owns a graphic design firm. He is an active member of and leader in a local chapter of a world-wide human rights organization, and is active in other national and local human and civil rights organizations:

I was raised in a household where my dad was a minister and my grandfather was not an official minister, but he would take my dad to the bowery in Chicago and preach down there at night. My grandfather died on the pulpit. He fell over sideways and was gone. My grandmother was there. It was a retirement camp. My dad was a Lutheran and my grandfather was a Baptist. Essentially the whole family is religious and basically conservative, most of them live in Chicago and my dad lives here and my mom is dead. My sister is back east and has become involved in a cult religion, like the Waco, Texas, scenario. It was a progression of the extreme conservative outlook. The counselors in this cult try to convince her that certain things happened in their lives. She turned away from my dad and said that being a Lutheran is not hard-

core enough for her beliefs. . . Then, when I was about 14 or 15, in 1967, they stopped executing people in California. When the last person was executed, I was very much opposed to it at the time. But I didn't know exactly why I was opposed to it, or didn't know all the factors that were at work. But I remember the night of the execution I almost wanted to take my dad's car and drive up to San Quentin and protest against it. I think I was aware that people were doing that then. I had the guy's picture on my wall for two years, and my parents didn't even know who he was. He was a Black guy. Years later I met his son at a conference where he acted in a play where they acted out his father's trial. He killed a cop while he was robbing \$50 from a restaurant. A lot of issues similar to this bothered me for a long period of time, but not having a strong education or any friends who cared about these issues. My work with Amnesty International has become work that I can do that I believe in. It's not about racial background, the history of the country or the particular brand of politics that is in power at the time. It's not based on religion. It's strictly how people treat each other.

After the interview was finished, Thomas encouraged me to attend some of the regular meetings of a human rights organizations in which he was active. He gave me flyers about upcoming events, fund-raisers and rallies, although he did not pressure me to attend. I felt that his commitment to these causes was strong and that he wanted me to be exposed to the information about human rights abuses which had such an impact on him and his commitment to become active in exposing these abuses.

Benjamin

Benjamin is a 45 year old European American, born in Wyoming and raised in Colorado. He is married, has two children - a boy eight and a girl six. He graduated from high school and is a construction worker. Benjamin has volunteered many hours each week for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) and several other United Way organizations. Much of his work involves helping children, the poor and those down on their luck. He includes his eight year old son in some of his service activities, many of which are not affiliated with any service organization. His son was present during my interview with Benjamin and responded occasionally to some remarks made by his father:

When I was a kid we were always punished and back then there was no such thing as child abuse. I could tell you some stories you wouldn't believe. My son very seldom gets punished. I try to talk to him instead of spank him. He's a good boy. I try to teach him to help people who are not as fortunate. We could be down in the dumps, we could be homeless. You never know. I have been fortunate to have a job and to help those not so fortunate. . . . I have taken my boy down to Tijuana. We saw the little boys and girls who have to sing for money. That tears you apart, knowing there is nothing you can do for them. . . . When I was a child my stepdad would get angry with me and lock me in the cooler for two days. I was four years old when my real dad took some nails and put them through a board and made me walk on the board. Blood poured out of my feet. He also used to tie me to the bed with ropes and if I peed in the bed, I got my butt kicked. . . . A lot of people back there just knew I

would be in trouble all my life, just rebelling. When I was 12 years old my mom drove me a hundred miles from home and said get out and don't come back. I managed to get home somehow, but by the time I was 17, I just left and came out to California. I turned out half way decent. I probably shouldn't have told you about my childhood, it wasn't real happy. So it's nice to see other kids smile who might have had a rough childhood. Especially some of these kids who are underprivileged or homeless. It means a lot to me to see them having a good time, taking their minds away from what they have had to go through. The streets is no place for these kids to be. That goes with them through their whole lives until they are adults. I carry the beatings I got as a kid. They stay with you. You can't forget that. . . . There are little girls who suffer from muscle diseases. I talk Donald Duck to them and every time they see me, they come running to me and it makes me feel like I am wanted, 'cause when I was a kid I was always rejected. Helping them helps me. It is important that I have helped somebody because when they go on in life, they can look back and say there was somebody there who helped them.

After the interview Benjamin encouraged me to consider visiting the offices of the MDA, and to think about coming to some of the fund-raisers and even to volunteer time for the organization. He said that it had been rewarding for him, that he just knew others would enjoy it as much as he did, and that the organization needed all the help they could get.

Jonathan

Jonathan preferred that I not quote him in this dissertation, so I will summarize his background and discuss his activities relevant to moral commitment and service to others. Jonathan is a 78 year old research scientist (emeritus), married, with two grown children. He was born in Nanking, China, to American parents who were Presbyterian missionaries. He lived in China for 13 years and then returned to the United States with his parents. He obtained a Ph.D. in 1940, and since then has taught and conducted research in a university. He has been involved in church work and other service work for the last 50 years. Fifteen years ago he founded a local chapter of a world-wide human rights organization, and is still an active member.

Jonathan's parents were responsible for his attitudes toward world affairs and human oppression. He cannot imagine not being involved in the struggle for human rights in some fashion, yet he feels torn among his teaching, research, family and service responsibilities and commitments. He expressed embarrassment about taking my time to interview him because he does not feel that what he does typifies moral commitment and he feels that he could be doing much more. Jonathan believes that scientists can use their knowledge and communication with each other to effect global human rights changes. He eagerly expresses these views to other scientists when they meet for world conferences in various countries. He advocates the use of reason and takes an active role in mounting diplomatic pressure against foreign governments to bring about changes in the treatment of prisoners of

conscience.

Jonathan appreciates that his profession is unlike any other aspect of human endeavor in the sense that he is able to make international professional contacts and friends easily. Without any barrier or delay he is able to be in the midst of persons who share common standards and a common scientific language, which allow them to discuss human and political concerns, as well as scientific concerns.

In addition to his human rights efforts, Jonathan works regularly with his church congregation to house, feed and retrain homeless men. He also participates in church activities in local rural areas and in Mexico. His motivation for working on human rights stems from his long-standing religious Christian beliefs and his views about the basic goodness, freedom and individual value of all human beings. He feels compelled to fulfill a moral obligation to act for those who are powerless to act on their own behalf, yet feels guilty about not doing all that he believes he is able to do.

Jonathan feels that the same things which motivated him initially to serve others also sustain his motivation, such as the continuing need for a focus on the abuse of human rights and human freedoms, which is still occurring in much of the world. The organization through which he works to alleviate the general suffering in the world appeals to him and his core beliefs about humankind, including the rights of women and children, and the right of all persons not to be tortured and persecuted.

Sara

Sara is 33 years old, married, European American and without children. She graduated from college and has worked as a community organizer. Sara has chosen to live with her husband, a physician, in a depressed inner city neighborhood close to where she volunteers as a full time coordinator for a grassroots organization which attempts to place health care reform on the statewide election ballot. Most of her time (from morning until eight or nine each evening) is spent collecting signatures, talking with the public, meeting with other volunteers and lobbying public officials for support for the organization:

I was a bit of a scared person all my life, raised in a fundamentalist environment. The thing about that environment is that it teaches you fear of other people who aren't like you. One of the reasons this work is a remarkable thing in my life, is because it has pushed me out of the fear. My mother lives in complete fear, and there is nothing worse than to be fearful all the time. She is afraid of the world, of the people in it. This work has really saved me from that. . . . When my own family experienced suffering, health crises and financial troubles, I was able to see a little bit of how other people were suffering and in pain. I am angry at a society which can allow people to fall through the cracks. . . . It is very rewarding work, because I meet people on the streets all the time who remind me of why I am doing what I am doing. Living in the community I live in is a way to remind myself that I belong to a privileged class. My husband is a pediatrician, and I am a white woman.

Just going to my local 7-11 (convenience store) in the morning and having coffee with prostitutes and drug dealers, is well. . . . All the people I work with are good people. I feel blessed. They are not judgmental, but open to all kinds of people and that is a theme I talk about a lot, but it's important to me to be in an environment with accepting people. I came from a background that was so unaccepting and so harsh. That's probably the reason I sought out this kind of work and these kind of people.

After the interview was finished, Sara told me about some of the organization's meetings in the near future which would be aimed at encouraging people to volunteer in the effort to put health care reform on the state ballot. She encouraged me, if I were interested, to come to meetings and get involved with this cause.

Randa

Randa is 65 years old, divorced, Jewish by upbringing and presently practices what she calls a metaphysical approach to belief in God and toward her life as a physical and spiritual creature. She attended college for a few years, but never graduated, and has some nursing training. She has three grown children. Randa retired from clerical work with a public agency, was a housewife earlier in life and is now a full-time volunteer. She has volunteered for 10 years with a hospice organization which supports terminally ill patients and their families and for eight years with the USO, a civic military support organization. Randa leads a very active life in service, as well as spending

time with her grandchildren and with her many friends, with whom she occasionally travels:

My mother died of cancer 18 years ago. I wasn't able to go to the house all the time because I still had family at home and couldn't get away that much. My father was still living and did the best to take care of her. I usually read a lot and had read an article about this organization which supports the needs of the terminally ill and their families. I thought at the time, I wished they had one here in San Diego, because they provide a team of helpers for home care - doctor, nurse, social worker, home health aide and volunteer. I thought it would have been nice if someone could have come in and given my Dad respite when mother was ill. So when the organization started up in this city, I was among the first to volunteer. . . . I feel that I am a very spiritual person. The religion I was born into laid very heavy guilt trips. When I came into the metaphysical spiritual movement, there was such freedom and I now feel closer to God than I ever had. . . . I feel everyone has a purpose and right now mine is to be of service. I also take good care of myself, so that I can give the overflow of my energy and loving to other people. And then as I do that it comes back to me.

Truman

Truman is a 74 year old, Catholic, German American widower with three grown children. He was born and raised in Texas, graduated from high school, took some junior college courses and worked for many years as a business

manager in public schools and service organizations. For the last four years he has volunteered many hours each week counseling terminally ill patients and helping their families as needed:

My wife and I were married for forty six years. We were high school sweethearts, and I felt that we had a perfect marriage. We had such a good life together. It was amazing. That might make it easier for me to be more detached when I help others. She got polio the last year before the polio vaccine was discovered and was handicapped in the upper part of her body. Years later she came down with Parkinson's disease and then developed an infection and became weaker and weaker. For the last two years I always had to help her in some respect. She was more or less an invalid and I took care of her altogether. I bathed her and did her hair and her nails and helped her dress and just general care giving. When she died I went to volunteer for purely selfish motives because all of a sudden I had lost my identity, my reason for being. I was used to helping my wife and now there was nothing for me to do. So I enrolled in a caregivers program where I learned how to counsel the dying and the bereaved. Counseling is not really the best word for it. You are really listening to them to see what needs they have and if you can help. Mainly it's just to let them get whatever is inside them off their chest. It's very rewarding. . . . Most of them are quite open about the fact that they know they are dying and they don't mind talking about it. Most of them say they hate to leave the person they have lived with for 50 years. I feel comfortable discussing death with them. I try to deal with

them as I would like to be dealt with. . . I knew right away I had to do this work, I had no choice. I had to help somebody else in my life. There was not really even a choice. I had such a void in my life when my wife died. Her death made me kind of immune to some feelings, like she sort of took them with her. Part of me is not there anymore. I feel like I am helping her when I help somebody else (cries openly). Well, I really am a very happy person. I really am. I am not sad even when I cry. It evokes memories that trigger the tears, but that's another thing that I am able to help people with. You can gauge your progress by the type of emotions and the type of memories you have. . . . I kept a journal after she died, partly so I would remember the sequence of events and how I felt, and partly because I felt I could pass it on to others who might find it helpful. . . . Grief is hard work. I feel I can counsel and motivate the bereaved, and help them realize that it's hard work, and it's something they have to work at to be able to function. . . . This may sound corny, but I think that the main reason we are here is to help somebody else. I really believe that. That is my philosophy, was my family background and upbringing. We ought to be considerate of other people. I think that's all religion is, how we treat each other.

Delia

Delia is a 53 year old, Catholic, Irish-German American born in Pittsburgh and raised in San Diego. She is married, with two grown children and three grandchildren. Delia has, in her words, "about 15 years of college, but

no degree." An adult child of an alcoholic, she was also physically abused as a child. She trained to be a nurse and worked as one for two years. The remainder of her married life has been spent as a housewife and a volunteer. Delia volunteered for 15 years for the Girl Scouts and for the last 10 years has volunteered for a local homeless shelter and social service agency:

Normally when people ask me why I do volunteer work, I say it keeps me off the streets and out of the bars at night (she laughs heartily), but you are probably the first person I have spoken to at length about why I do it. My history of volunteerism is rather diverse. I did 15 years with Girl Scouts. Did every job I wanted to do in that organization and became frustrated with the organization. Then I heard of Father Joe's and what he was up to. I joined up to help him. . . . I have done volunteer work for 30 years or more. The good Lord has provided for me through my husband, and I have no desire to be in the social circuit or be a social climber. Luncheons and teas don't hold a lot of interest for me. I felt the only way I could repay God for his goodness was to be His hands, to be His assistant here. What I do is really small, but it's all I can do, because I can't give money or burnt offerings to God. He doesn't need that. God didn't think I needed a job, so He took care of that. So, what else is there to do to direct my energies and interests to? I had always felt alone religiously. My husband, who is a wonderful person, had religion crammed down his throat as a kid. And he believes you just do your own thing. So I felt awkward for years about bringing outsiders, religious people, into the home. It would make him nervous. So I didn't

preach religion, I just lived it. I kind of just did my thing. . .

Immediately after the taped interview was finished, and again during a phone conversation, Delia told me, "You know why you picked this topic for your dissertation, don't you?" as if to say, "I know there is a significant reason you chose this topic." She said that she thought my decision to research moral commitment revealed some type of calling for me and that it will have significance for me personally. Perhaps it served, she said, as an entree for me into the experience of serving others so that I could accept that as a calling in my own life. I saw Delia's revelations as attempts to convert, if not recruit, me into the ranks of the morally committed, or at the very least, to encourage me to understand the significance of moral commitment in my own life.

Summary

These life story profiles portray participants as persons who experienced different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and different perspectives on God, faith and religion. Varying levels of family support, exposure to the needy, educational training, and their reflections on the human condition and suffering also influenced their lives in some manner. There is no pattern of background, no common experience shared by all participants. Yet, they all chose, or were moved, to reach out to others in need and to serve them in some manner. In the next chapter I will present the major themes which became apparent as I reviewed interview transcripts.

CHAPTER FIVE

Presentation of Findings

Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings of this study, the phenomenological description and illustrations of the essential themes or components of moral commitment. The phenomenological description is a distillation of the most salient and common participant experiences and themes which I determined during data analysis to be the essential structure of moral commitment. The thematic illustrations contain stories, details and examples, mostly in the participants' own words, which aid in understanding the meaning of their experiences of moral commitment through service to others.

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the lived experience of moral commitment by conducting in-depth, open-ended interviews with ten participants who were dedicated to serving others. Each participant demonstrated sustained dedication or sacrifice of time apart from their personal, family and work lives to serve others in some capacity. The open-ended question I used to begin each interview with participants ("Could you tell me a story which conveys what it means to you to be of service to others?") did not include a request for information about their lives. Before,

throughout and after the interviews, however, participants were eager to offer pieces of information about their lives, type of upbringing, religious training, education and what they believed led them to serve others. This information has been incorporated into the presentation of findings, as well as into the profiles in Chapter Four.

Phenomenological Description of Moral Commitment

The lived experience of moral commitment, spanning the course of a few years or most of a lifetime, is a process or "cycle" which includes becoming aware of the needs of others, caring about others' welfare and, either through a "conscious choice" or a compulsion, acting to serve others. Inherent in this largely selfless service to others is the understanding that it is typically an extension of belief in God or a "higher power," force or spirit, of a belief in justice and in fair and compassionate treatment of others, and of a desire to "make a difference" in this world. Service is generally preceded and accompanied by passionate feelings, and accompanied and followed by psychic rewards, both of which serve to sustain motivation for further service. Earlier life experiences, strongly held beliefs and awareness of the needs of others influence the unique type of service in which the morally committed person becomes engaged. In this sense, moral commitment cannot be separated from the past or present, having been clearly influenced by experiences, values and beliefs, and having become a "way of life" for the committed individual. Moral commitment is typically characterized by some degree of internal conflict, occasionally producing guilt or frustration, between service to others and some other

important area or areas of the lives of the morally committed, such as conflict due to time away from family or work. However, these conflicts ultimately seem to diminish in the presence of an overriding belief in the value of service to others and for many of service to and partnership with God, and by virtue of the role service plays in the development of personal satisfaction, growth and rewards for the morally committed.

Introduction to Presentation of Themes

Experiences of moral commitment were richly interwoven throughout the fabric of participants' lives, yet I have attempted in this chapter to extract predominant themes and present them in participants' own words as separate units of meaning. Although the themes and illustrations are presented separately, considerable overlap became apparent as I analyzed interview transcripts. Participant stories and understandings of their experiences of moral commitment were quite fluid, and often one theme or meaning overlapped with other themes. The presentation of separate themes and their illustrations is an attempt to bring understanding to the phenomenological description of moral commitment, yet thematic overlap may be apparent to the reader at various points in sections which follow.

The phenomenon of moral commitment as understood by these participants is not solely an isolated act performed, a choice made or a belief held, but is really a human process. One participant, Jerry, offered his understanding of the development of moral commitment as a process when he described moral commitment as a "flow of things." The process, as he

described it, does not seem to be grounded in any cause and effect relationship, yet there may be experiences in a life which could lead one to act in certain ways. Jerry shared:

This was not just a thing that happened in my life. It wasn't a quick process. . . I think our lives are unfolding for years to get us to a place to be of service or a place to get what we need. So if you look at that in terms of the flow of things, it's part of a process that is taking me to tomorrow and the next day and the next day. What I did in the past affects what I do in the future. It's all a process. I find that I don't have to go looking for service, service comes looking for me. . . . When people see that you are interested and active and willing to help, then they come to ask you to help even more.

A Way of Life

Good works and service to others were not isolated acts or incidents, but flowed from earlier life experiences, beliefs and choices, becoming "ways of life." In this sense, their past impacted participants' present actions and influenced how they should live, becoming a natural progression of experience, understanding and service. The phrase way of life also held meaning which transcended mere occupation, role or status in society. They understood their service as part of a unified way of life, not only as discrete daily acts within the context of their lives, but also as part of a larger cycle of life and commitment shared by many others. Service pervaded, however, most aspects and details of their lives - - where they lived, the friends they made and kept, the feelings

they experienced, the choices they faced and the conflicts they experienced because of their service to others.

The following quotes illustrate what "way of life" meant for some. When asked to tell a story about her service to others Delia said:

I never think of it in terms of stories. I consider it a way of life. . . . It's all I know. We all need to have things of interest and value to us and I can't think of anything I would rather be doing. . . . I don't spend a lot of time thinking about the specific incidents, but it is a most rewarding and satisfying way to live. For me it is a way of life.

Jonathan, who preferred not to be quoted in this study, agreed when he said that he could not imagine any other way to live, except committing himself more. And Sara said, "I can't not be involved anymore. I can no longer ignore the world around me and go on with my comfortable life." Thomas concurred when he offered, "I can't see myself not doing these things, no matter what I do in life. I may buy another house in another area, but I will always be involved in some way. . . . It's become a habit I guess. It's the only way to live."

And Brenda offered:

Living the way I live is a joy. . . . Being caught up in the community right now is important to me, but my main goal is just living my life as Jesus did. He is my example. . . . I try to live my life by Christian principles. . . . When children are raised with Christian values, it teaches them how to deal with their problems in a positive way. It is all tied in, how to live a moral and Christian life. It's not just a Christian way to live, you could call it a moral life.

Jerry, Brenda's husband, said, "I feel like the whole cycle feeds itself. The more you give the more you want to give. It becomes a way of life after a while."

Some participants described their service to others as being part of a chain or cycle of commitment which extended beyond themselves. They understood that other committed individuals served also, that commitment was displayed not merely by their isolated individual acts. They perceived their own commitment as continuous or repeated outpourings of service over time which became a way of life for them, as well as part of a larger human cycle of service and commitment. Jerry offered a detailed and instructive explanation of the cycle of commitment as he understood it in his own life:

I feel like the whole cycle feeds itself. The more you give the more you get. The more you get the more you want to give. . . . For me the service cycle, or the effort to stay out of self-centered behavior, becomes a real necessity. . . . It has taken me many years and a lot of changes and I realize that life is ups and downs, it's cyclic and I have done a lot of soul searching about that. . . . It's that juggle of life. The whole flow of life includes the bad as well as the good. . . . That's the way the cycle works. You get what you need when you need it, but you have to put yourself out there. . . . The more you give and receive and live in the life cycle, the more you want to live and the more you enjoy life. . . . My goal on earth, my reason for living is that God needs me to do these things, the world needs it, the cycle needs it. Everybody needs me to do my part. Just like I need everybody else to do their part. . . . That's how God works

through people. I feel like that's a necessary part of my life, being a part of that chain. . . . I value being there. I feel like I have been able to be there for a lot of people, and I value being in that position. That is part of what service does. It puts you out there where you can be of service. Like you choose to do something and while you are there. . . . A good example of that is some friends of ours took some food down to the stadium after the earthquake, and they ended up staying there for five hours working. The volunteers were swamped and needed help, so my friends took that next step. That's how I feel about this. I was there for that next step. It was like I was in the job to be of service and because of that I was able to be there for that lady (a troubled stranger he embraced in a hospital lobby while entertaining as a clown).

Eddie shared how the chain of commitment worked when he said, "I believe that the history of this country is based on helping people more unfortunate than you are. And that it would give those people the incentive to help someone else. And it just goes on in a chain." Truman described how keeping a journal after his wife died helped him, and then how the journal became part of the cycle of service in which he interacted. "I kept it so I would remember the sequence of events and how I felt, and partly so I could pass it on to others it would be helpful to. Everybody who has read it said it has helped them." And Brenda simply stated, "A lot of people say this is my life and they don't look at how their life affects other people. Or how they can help other people. The good in my life comes because I put good out."

Way of life exemplified through the exercise of moral commitment

cannot be detached from life experiences which molded these participants, beliefs which they grew to cherish, choices they made to serve others, conflicts they experienced and the understanding that doing good for others was an extension of their belief in God and their caring and just concern for humankind. In the following sections I will discuss the various life experiences and beliefs, choices, forces, conflicts and actions which were described by participants as essential to the exercise of their moral commitments and their way of life, a central theme of this study.

Life Experiences and Beliefs

Motivation for service stemmed from early family and other life experiences and from beliefs which mostly developed early and were refined later in life. For some participants, early life experiences were harsh or negative and they reacted against that background through their moral commitment and service to others. All were prompted to act according to beliefs and belief systems. For some, moral commitment signified firm Christian beliefs and values, and for others, belief in individual rights and freedoms guided their service behavior. Many participants hoped to build a sense of community and others sought to bring the values of learning and education to those they encountered through service. Belief in just and caring treatment of the oppressed in society and throughout the world drove some toward one-on-one service involvement, and for many a belief in God or a higher spiritual force or meaning guided their service work and their lives. Reaction to or against past life experiences combined with strong beliefs and values to

form the foundation of their way of life. Their lives and service seemed to be embedded in those beliefs and past experience.

The importance of helping others was taught to Eddie by his mother's example:

Where I come from people were very poor and it was always instilled in me by my parents to help other people, because we were more fortunate than other people. . . My mother was very religious, and she would tell me it was good and you would be blessed by helping other people. I grew up like that and I believe that to this day. . . . Persons in a community have a debt to pay to that community. Keep it safe, clean, honorable.

Benjamin expressed feelings about his family and how his past influenced his efforts, along with others, to help those in need. "The people I work with here are like a big family. You can talk with them and be with them just like being a family. That's important to me because when I was a child I didn't have a close knit family." Sara expressed similar sentiments:

I was seeking out acceptance in my life because I came from a real disciplined, demanding environment. To be a certain kind of girl, woman, wife, all those roles that society tells me I needed to fulfill. This work has made me a stronger woman. Also, the people I met on the streets tell me about their lives and how they are lacking and have needs that are unmet. What brought me to work to make a difference was anger, quite frankly. I looked around me and saw the unfairness and the injustice and it made me angry.

Thomas reacted out of frustration against what he viewed as the

mainstream, majority values of present American culture when he said:

A lot of issues bothered me for a long time. I guess you could say I was frustrated for a long time and wanted to do something, but I didn't know how to effectively do something. It has just become work that I can do that I believe in. . . . I am against the death penalty because I was morally opposed to it since I was a teenager. And it's a violation of human rights and of the Charter of the United Nations. The U.N. doesn't take any action on it at this point in time. . . . With me the death penalty has always been a personal issue. . . . It's not a real complex thing. It's just a response to the whole culture in which I was living for which I didn't have a lot of respect.

Jerry pointed to a sense of powerlessness in his efforts to be and to do good in the past when he was actively abusing drugs and alcohol. "I was powerless to keep it all together. I can't be responsible for all of life, but I can suit up and show up and try to do my best. Even in the throes of my addiction, I still wanted to be a good person."

Sara confronted long-held fears when she began her work gathering signatures on the streets:

One of the reasons I do this work is that I get to be around people who I wouldn't from the way I was raised, in a middle class upbringing. I would have never dared enter their world. Talking to people who are homeless, who have been in prison or who have had bad breaks or made bad choices. I find out that they are real people with real feelings, kids and moms. I pushed myself to experience these new things. I was a bit of a

scared person all my life. This work has pushed me out of the fear and made me go out and meet people who I used to consider bad or sinners or scary, people to stay away from. I'll be honest, sometimes it is scary, but usually once I get past that, it is really a privilege to get the chance to experience another culture and another environment and another world.

Thomas addressed the role of information in the development of his beliefs and service work when he said:

For a while I did react to the increase in violent crime like a lot of other people in the country. But once I found out the facts, being involved with human rights organizations and doing some research on it over time, I found that the reality was very different from that. The people being executed are not the people who commit the worst crimes. They are the ones on the low end of the socioeconomic strata. It's just become work that I can believe in. . . . It's a way of thinking that I believe in.

Others were more optimistic about the world and the role belief played for them. Delia said, "That's what we are here for. I think everyone should serve others. That's my belief system." And Jerry said, "I believe that the world is a much better place than people want to say." Eddie spoke of his belief in the power of love as his motivation when he said, "All I can base anything on is love. Love is the ammunition. When you start a program, you can name it anything you want to, but it's gonna be love. People have forgotten what love is." Sara was fervent in her feelings about her beliefs. She said:

It becomes an ideology or belief system, but it's not a dogmatic thing.

When I see the incongruities and inconsistencies in society, it hurts. I actually feel things intensely. I don't know if it's good or bad, it just is. I don't want to feel that pain anymore. In a way is very selfish. I want everyone to have at least as good a life as I have. I feel anger and pain when people are suffering and it hurts.

Delia talked about the strength of her commitment stemming from her belief in duty:

It's the motivation behind it. It's your duty to serve and share in the responsibility. All of us have an obligation to do what is our duty and if we want to turn it into a prayer, we do it dutifully as a gift to God. We do it pleasantly without complaint and we do it fairly and completely.

Brenda shared her belief that Christian values are essential for raising children and building community:

It is real important to me, for my children, as well as the rest of the children in the community, to raise our children with Christian values. . . If we start with just one community and get other Catholic churches involved, we would have fewer problems in those communities. And when children are raised with Christian values, it doesn't solve their problems, but it teaches them how to deal with them in a positive aspect.

Some participants believed in the value of each individual person and in the importance of caring and fair treatment of all individuals. Jonathan talked about his belief in the higher nature of humans, and that one function of that higher nature is to recognize the value of each individual, and that each

individual should be able to exercise his or her conscience. It was important to him that the members of the organization with whom he worked self-selected on the basis of similar beliefs and attitudes about human nature and interaction. About how we should treat one another, Truman said, "I think the main reason we are here is to help somebody else. I really believe that. . . We were taught to be considerate of other people. It's personal but also religious." Sara echoed those sentiments when she said:

My community is the friends who share our values. They might not be in my neighborhood, but are people who choose to bond together.

Community can't be forced upon you. But blood doesn't necessarily mean that you are community. You might have another community more loving than the one you are born into."

Other beliefs which related to participants' service to others were honesty, justice and the value of learning. Eddie talked about the importance to him of honor and honesty among individuals when he said:

There was no such thing as hobos raping and killing people or things like that because there was an honor among them. . . . People now have lost faith and trust in each other. We need to instill this back in people. Not only poor people, but rich people too. . . . I show them love and teach them the ways I came up, teaching them how to be honest, that's the main thing.

Sara related her belief in freedom and justice to her own privileged circumstances and her desire for all to share her good fortune:

I want people to have that right and to have the blessings and the joys

that I have had. Freedom is really important but not the type they shout at us on the television, but real freedom. The reason I do what I do is that I want to live in a world that is more just and more fair and where people are more on an equal footing. Actually, the truth of it, what brought me to work to make a difference is anger, quite frankly. I look around me and see the unfairness and the injustice and it makes me angry. People are dying because there is no access to care. I don't want to live in a country where we are so cruel in a society where we don't look out for other people.

Eddie also combined his concerns about freedom and justice when he said:

Where is ours? I want mine, too, white folks. So we won't be ignorant like you say we are. Give us our justice. We don't only need freedom, we need justice! That's why they don't like people like me to rise. Because I am a smart nigger. White people don't like smart niggers (hearty laughter and tears streaming down his face).

And Thomas shared his concerns about justice when he said:

It just bothered me that the state could just kill a person. To me it didn't seem right, but I didn't know why at the time. . . . Rather than basing it on any religious outlook, it's based on the facts and the reality that these people are getting abused, incarcerated for no reason, are being tortured, and sometimes killed. To me it's a satisfying way to proceed because it's based strictly on that, not on any prejudice. That's important to me, that balance.

And Eddie shared his views about the value of education when he said: Basically I am interested in education, especially for my people. And I haven't been able to find anyone who wants to help Black people or educate them the way I want to educate them, in the way I was educated. If a person has a formal education and no mother wit, then as far as I am concerned they are not educated.

Sara shared similar concerns:

If I am not learning then I am not growing. I feel I must always be learning. . . These things I am doing now, this is how I have been the most enriched and have experienced the most growth. . . . Learning means growth and living, feeling alive. . . . For God's sake, we had better be informed and have opinions, or things will happen to us. I can no longer ignore the world around me and go on with my comfortable life.

Beliefs in God, a higher spiritual power or in a particular faith were essential components of participants' development as persons and were important motivations for serving others as an expression of moral commitment in their lives. Randa expressed:

I was very much in love with my husband. That marriage ended. And if it hadn't been for my strong belief and faith. It really held me together. I think what keeps me going is . . . many things. How can I put this. The first thing that popped into my mind is my faith in God. I feel very close to God and this is where I get my strength. I feel very spiritual. I just have a lot of faith. My faith helps to keep me going here where we see death and dying all the time. There is something beyond life here on

earth.

Benjamin offered, "I don't go to church all the time, but I still believe, especially for the children." And Eddie said, "I have a feeling that someone, a higher power, takes care of us." Delia shared, "I really believe that we are here as part of a whole part of the universe, that we are all part of God's creation. And we each have a role to play. Religion is hypocrisy if you don't live it." And Jerry said:

I think that if I didn't have the belief that God is good and that the whole flow of life includes the bad as well as the good, that the goal is not to be perfect, the goal is not to have everything together. As long as I can keep that in mind on a good day (heartly laugh), then I can accept the hardship.

Jerry's wife, Brenda, said:

When I was growing up I was taught this real punishing God, that if you did something wrong you were going to hell and all that. I want to teach my children a loving and caring God, not to be afraid of Him. That's a real important part of my life. I try to live by Christian principles. Since Jerry came into the church, we started making that our community rather than the Narcotics Anonymous community. I found that having the same higher power had a lot more power, and the people in the church were a lot healthier.

The Compelling Force and Choice of Commitment

Moral commitment was also understood as a compelling force which

most participants could not resist. They described this force as an urge or need that "had" to be fulfilled. Some, whose need to serve others was compelling and literally uncontrollable, also understood their commitments as choices or decisions made. Choice can imply the act of freely choosing or selecting an alternative and the use of judgment in choosing something based on one's preferences. In this sense commitments were understood as choices to be made, with an important end in view. However, other participants explored conscious versus unconscious choice, saying that on occasion choices were not made, they just "happened." Most of their choices to serve appeared not to be final or one-time-only. They were continually exercising their right or freedom to choose courses of action they believed in more than others as part of a continuing way of life. For some, the choices even coincided with the compelling need to be of service and seemed to occur simultaneously.

Brenda described the compelling force leading her to serve others when she said, "I wanted to teach the children a loving and caring God, not to be afraid of Him. So, I really felt compelled to do that and really enjoy it."

Similarly, her husband, Jerry, said:

One of my philosophies of my work is to connect with people. I have to connect with people. . . I feel like it's a necessary part of my life. . . For me, the service cycle becomes a real necessity.

Others described this compelling force in terms of what they felt they had to do, as if their service was inevitable. Thomas said, "It got to the point with me that I knew I had to do something about particular issues. . . . I can't see myself not doing it at this point, no matter what I do, I will always be

involved in some way." And Jonathan described the conflicts he experienced among the several roles in his life, but maintained that his involvement in human rights was something he just had to do. Delia shared, "I am just trying to stay open, wherever God leads me and let that happen. . . . If you are filled with love and kindness, you cannot help but extend that." Truman shared the compelling need he felt to help others after his wife died:

I knew right away that I had to do this. I had no choice. I had to help somebody else in my life. There was not even a choice. I had such a void in my life when my wife died, and I had been so used to helping her. In a way, I felt like I was still helping her when I help somebody else.

And Sara compared the compelling force she felt to the drive she knew artists also felt:

When I was in school I was an art major and I love art and miss it. But one of the things I remember is that so many artists just had to create art. So I sort of feel a little bit that way about being involved in my community or the world around me. . . . To me it's an all or nothing thing and really about people's lives. That's important to me.

Sara blended her belief about doing her best with this compelling force. "I don't know how many lives we have. If it's just one, I want to do it fully, and really experience something! The best I can." And Benjamin described the compelling force differently when he said, "It was a calling when I started. We need you!" Benjamin also described his efforts to recruit others to serve in community agencies, saying:

I would be the first one down there and the last one to go home. It was

like a hook. But I don't need it anymore, they've got me. I'm already landed. And that could happen to anybody. I try to get more of my friends to be involved with it. But it doesn't work for them. It has to be in here to do it (points to his heart). It's got to be in your heart.

Very aware of her continual choice-making, Brenda said, "God knows and He is the only one who needs to know. You don't have to walk around with this long look on your face. It's my choice, a conscious choice, most of the time." Yet God's role and her own role in her choice seemed to blend into one when she said, "I have a dedication to service and I have principles by which I live my life, but everyday I try to turn my life over to God and then God's in control of my life and whatever happens then is His will." Delia also stressed the value of her daily choice when she said, "Every day you have to choose God. And every day you have to seek His assistance to live more Christlike. You can't assume. So you just do it."

Jerry gave an example of the inevitability of his service to others when he said, "I really didn't choose that, it came out of the blue. I chose obviously to walk over and put my hand on his shoulder that day, but that was probably as unselfish an act as I had ever done." Yet, when exploring his decisions about his personal life, he did convey the importance of a choice among three alternatives, when Jerry said, "You either have this tremendous responsibility to act right all the time or you have a tremendous irresponsibility. Or there is the option I try to take which becomes a tremendous freedom, where you allow it all to be in God's hands."

Jonathan also said that he was conscious most of the time about the

choices he has made. His choice reflected his bias toward the restoration of human rights and freedoms when choosing the organization for which he works. He said that others work to feed the hungry and help the homeless, but he would rather put his talents to good use for other beliefs and needs. Sara chose to live in a certain community so that she could be close to those for whom she is campaigning, those disenfranchised from basic health care:

It is a small thing, but just living in the community that I live in is a way for me to remind myself that I am not a super special privileged person. I can't not be involved any more. I can no longer ignore the world around me and go on with my comfortable life. I could choose to have a different life. My husband's a doctor. It's a heavy burden we put on ourselves, but we choose to.

The inevitability of Sara's service and way of life related to her desire that others have freedom of choice as well. "I am just trying to get people to remember it's just to get it on the ballot. They can choose to vote against it later on. We encourage people not to be hostile towards the concept of having the right to have a choice."

On a more personal level, Randa spoke of the importance of personal choice in relationship to her service to others. Her freedom to choose resulted in her opting for challenge, as well as fulfillment:

It's very fulfilling, very fulfilling. I have come to a stage in my life where if something is not fulfilling for me, I don't do it. With the woman who had ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis). I took her to the bathroom, just about as personal as you could get and was told I didn't have to do

that either. It was my choice. It was something I felt I wanted to do. I felt needed.

Doing Good for God

In an earlier section I described participants' beliefs in a higher power or God, beliefs varying from mild deference or an understanding of the workings of God's will in their lives, to an intense spirituality or faith in God. Those beliefs seemed to prepare their paths to do God's will by doing good works. Their feelings of spirituality, their acting as a conduit for God's love and their beliefs in doing good or affecting change through their service to others appeared essential to the development and exercise of their moral commitment. Some participants merely described their commitment as an example of how human beings should treat each other, without reference to God. Inherent in such description, however, is the Golden Rule code from the New Testament, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" which Truman reflected when he said:

I feel comfortable with them discussing death, and I think it is good for them. And lots of times we are just have a good time. I try to deal with them as I would like to be dealt with. . . . It's personal, but also religious, being thoughtful of others. I think anyone who would hurt someone else's feelings is about the meanest person in the world.

Being or doing good, doing the right thing and being the best one could be reflected a moral or religious code which guided some participants' behavior.

Delia described how she wanted to live a good life when she said:

What you have to do is live your life, do the best you can. You can't make your neighbor be a good guy, you cannot legislate morality or decency. . . . Being good is to be Christian. That is what we are to strive to be. It is the intent by the way. It doesn't mean that I didn't do the best job that could be done. I did the best I could do.

In explaining his service to others, Benjamin said:

Well, it's kind of special, 'cause you know you are doing good, that you helped so many people. Just knowing that I have done good for people and knowing that you have touched someone who really needs the help. Knowing that, you get a tremendous feeling when you come home.

And Thomas, who experienced a fundamentalist Christian upbringing, still reflected the Golden Rule, even as he disavowed religion, when he succinctly voiced, "It's strictly about how one person treats another person. It's not about religion, but about how people treat each other."

Understandings of God, acceptance of God's will or plan for their lives, and appreciation of their own spirituality aided most participants' in comprehending their moral commitments. When asked what helped sustain her motivation and service to others, Randa said:

I think what keep me going is, many things. How can I put this. The first thing that popped in my mind is my faith in God. I feel very close to God and this is where I get a lot of my strength. I feel very spiritual and in fact carry a card in my wallet that says, "God is my partner." This is the way I feel. I get my strength from that. I feel everybody has a purpose. And I think one of my purposes right now is to be of service. I

just have a lot of faith. I feel that I am a very spiritual person. I feel closer to God than I ever had.

About her spirituality and her understanding of God's will in her life,

Delia said:

The spiritual trip is not a straight line. One day it dawned on me, the "Our Father" says, give us this day our daily bread. Remember the manna that fell daily? They were only allowed to take enough for one day. Every day you have to choose God and seek His assistance to live more Christlike. You can't assume. Being good is to be Christian. Well, God knows our intentions, and I believe we are judged on that, more than on the actual doing. Because we are likely to stumble and lose our temper and get lazy. It is the intention and the striving for goodness which is being Christlike. That is the essence of our existence. If we open ourselves to God, He will fill us with His good things. We won't just do good things. . . . We don't often get to be Christ's hands and to serve. . . I am just trying to stay open, wherever God leads me and let that happen.

Jerry's understanding of his service and of its development flowed from a spiritual experience:

I really didn't have a church affiliation, though I always had a strong connection, a spiritual calling. And three years ago I decided to find out about the church and became very active in the church again. At one point I turned my will and life over to the care of God as I understood Him. I did that totally, one hundred percent, felt wonderful. It was a

spiritual experience. It felt phenomenal and I felt like because I had reached that point, that my life was going to be changed forever. I felt that for that one moment, I would forever be at peace with God and life was good. What happened was I woke up the next day (he laughs heartily), and it has taken me many years and a lot of changes. I realize that life is ups and downs. It's cyclic. But you allow it all to be in God's hands and try to do your best. And even when you make mistakes and don't do well, try to let God take care of it. Try to make mistakes by a part of life.

Brenda expressed her understanding of God in her life, commitment and service, saying:

There but for the grace of God go I. That's Jesus' teaching. I see a drunk on the street, and it could be me. If I hadn't gotten the help I did twelve years ago, it could be me. I am grateful, so I do what I can do. I have a dedication to service and principles by which I live my life. But, everyday I try to turn my life over to God and then God's in control of my life.

Benjamin understood his service in the context of a type of spiritual insurance policy:

One day, you never know, I might be down on my luck and it will all come back to me. Cause, the Lord helps them that helps others. And when you go to see the Man upstairs, He'll say, we have a special place for you.

One participant, Delia, spoke of her role as a "conduit" for God's love:

Like Mother Teresa, I am a pencil in God's hands. I am trying to let go and let God run my life. But I am a long way from that. I am a conduit. He talks about that in the New Testament, about how we are filled with His love and peace, and as we give our lives to Him, it passes right through to other people. If you are filled with love and kindness, you cannot help but extend that. So, in effect, you become His hands since He is not with us. One of the joys of volunteer work is that what you do is passed on. And I believe that if God wants me to have an opportunity to tell somebody about what I do for others, then that will happen because that person needs to hear it.

Jerry shared how his service passed on to others and had impact beyond his reach:

I believe my service does make a difference in other people's lives. I believe it comes back in weird, convoluted and surprising ways and in blessings that are totally unrelated. That's how God works through people. (Referring to a stranger, a woman he hugged in a hospital lobby) My reality is that God paid me to walk up and hug that lady. God pays my wages and puts me in these positions, to be of service.

Inner Conflict

Inner conflict, struggles or frustration over mutually exclusive desires or forces, or between two or more mutually desirable impulses or goals did not prevent participants from continuing their service, commitment and way of life. However, they were keenly aware of these struggles and experienced

continuing frustration over them. Brenda accepted the opposition of her own will to God's will when she said:

I have a dedication to service and I have principles by which I live my life. But everyday I try to turn my life over to God and then God's in control of my life and whatever happens then is His will. I have learned that if I get in there and try to do things my way, things don't go right. Sometimes I wonder and feel like I am beating my head against the wall and then I say, wait, maybe I haven't prayed today or gotten into the right focus. I am maybe into me today instead of being into God's will for me.

Delia expressed a similar dilemma when she said, "I am just trying to stay open, wherever God leads me and let that happen. I can't say that is my basic personality type to do that." Others spoke of their inner battles between personality traits, even flaws, and their desire to serve others, uncluttered by such flaws. Thomas said:

I am not a disciplined person at this point. It's always a hassle to get out of the office at a certain time. I am extremely frustrated because I don't do more. Discipline is a problem with me. I see myself being active, as active as anyone overall, but I don't see myself as being the most disciplined. I am not a public speaker. That's another thing that frustrates me the most.

And Jerry described the conflict between responsibility and irresponsibility as being a part of his life:

You either have this tremendous responsibility to act right all the time,

or you have a tremendous irresponsibility because you think it's overwhelming. You say, well, "just screw that. I am not going to do any of that. I am going to do what I want." Or there is the option I try to take which becomes a tremendous freedom. You allow it all to be in God's hands and you try to do your best. And even when you make mistakes and don't do well, try to let God take care of it. Try to make mistakes be a part of life.

Some spoke of conflicts of interest or duty in their lives which caused them frustration. Jonathan, who was 78 years old, discussed how he encountered this dilemma. He had major areas of his life pulling at him - - teaching, research, family and work for human rights. He was frustrated that each area was getting shortchanged and said that there was just no guidance on how to balance them all. Yet he was resigned, in fact eager, to continue to strive for that balance. And although Jonathan worked for human rights for almost 50 years, he felt his efforts could not be considered moral commitment because he only spent a few hours each week on such endeavors. He thought there were other people who were more committed than he was. Brenda described what the struggle between the constraints and responsibilities of daily life and her desire to be of service was like for her:

If I were to win the lottery today, I would dedicate my life to service. But unfortunately you have to make a living, feed your family and have those responsibilities too. I do as much as I can possibly do and sometimes I find out that I do too much and get tired and worn out. Another thing is that when you volunteer your time, the more you do the

more people are calling upon you to do. So you have to learn how to say no sometimes, which is difficult. You feel like you are letting them down, and you are concerned that there are not enough people out there doing these things.

Some participants expressed an inner struggle between the desire for recognition and the offering of completely unselfish service. Benjamin found that the impact of his service to others helped quiet that struggle:

I still get mixed emotions about it. Like, why do I go down there and work my butt off and some days you feel that you aren't being recognized. But, then I think, Benjamin, you are not down there for Benjamin, you are down there to help the kids. Without the kids there would be no plaques on my wall. Without the smiles on their faces, those plaques would mean nothing.

Delia discussed her inner battle between wanting to share her excitement about her good deeds and her belief that the deeds go unrecognized by all except God:

I am uncomfortable about wearing the nametag that shows I am the president of the auxiliary. I just want to blend into the woodwork. But that's not easy. It also could be a headtrip, I have to work on that. I would like to have it be selfless, and not blow my horn, and announce what I do. When I went to Los Angeles (to help with earthquake relief), I wanted to shout to the rooftops, guess where I have been. But that isn't why you do it. I really did needed to talk about it at first, because I was in overload when I came back. But I believe that if God wants me to

have an opportunity to tell somebody about what I did, that it will happen.

About her struggle between recognition and selflessness Brenda said: It's tempting sometimes. You get up and strut around, and we all have that in us. Sometimes I really have to fight back the temptation. God knows and He is the only one who needs to know. You don't have to walk around with this long look on your face. Oh poor me. You are doing it for God, so why try to get other people to feel sorry for you. It's my conscious choice. But sometimes that little voice kicks in.

Truman seemed to understand others' needs to show their appreciation to him, even though he preferred they not show it:

I would rather they didn't shower me with gratitude. Lots of times they will try to give me some money for gas and, of course, I refuse that absolutely. But if it's a gift I wouldn't refuse it. That seems to be part of the helping that I do. You have to allow people to reciprocate if they would like to.

Sara shared her frustrations over her efforts to enlist support for health policy change:

I go out every day collecting signatures. It's interesting to say the least. Sometimes it's very aggravating because there is some hostility out there toward the concept of democracy. I just get frustrated.

And Benjamin spoke about his heart-rending encounters with poor children on his trips to Tijuana, Mexico, with his son and about the effect his work had on his wife:

I have taken him down to Tijuana and we have looked at the little boys and girls who have to sing for money. That tears you apart, knowing there is nothing you can do for them. . . . The wife really doesn't like it too much, 'cause I am gone quite a bit, but she understands that it is important to me to help people.

Making a Difference

Caring about and responding to human need and suffering were crucial in participants' desires to "make a difference" in others' lives. Their caring concern ranged from the very personal, physical human needs to the more abstract and global needs for justice and social change. Participants described how they responded to those needs by actively seeking to help on personal, community and societal levels. Their seemingly constant awareness of and caring response to others' needs seemed inseparable from their efforts to make a difference. Jerry explained why it was important for him to respond on a very personal level to others' needs:

I have a stronger need to be of personal service than mass type. I am not called to write letters to my Congressman to change the laws.

That's not where my heart is. It's how can I help this person right here.

What I do makes people feel better, helps them forget their woes.

Thomas commented on what he perceived was the depth of need when he said, "The frustration is that there are not enough people to get out there every day of the year." And Eddie offered:

The fault is not in the poor people. If they don't have someone to think

about them they are going to get less help. And God knows they need all the help they can get and more. So I feel if I am not around, they won't get the attention they get, they won't get the love they should get.

After working at a relief center for earthquake victims, Delia said, "They genuinely had a need for assistance and we were there to give them aid. It was an endless, endless stream of people. All day long. . . . You never run out of volunteer work. It's there all the time."

Participants talked about making a difference in the lives of others, by caring for their basic needs, by attempting to transform people's beliefs, by helping others live at a higher standard or live happier lives, by attempting to create a better society or community and by changing community, national and international policy. Although not describing themselves as change agents or leaders, they intended to and in some cases did bring about change in the lives of others or in society through the exercise of their moral commitment.

Jerry related making a difference to his understanding of the cycle of commitment he had described earlier:

I believe that when you put your energy out to do something other than for yourself, when you try to be unselfish with it, or when you do something just because you've committed to it, I think it creates ripples in peoples' lives. It affects people. I believe they do make a difference in other people's lives. I believe that I couldn't make it through my day without other people doing that for me. There is no doubt in my mind.

Other participants spoke about the impact their commitment and service had or might have on others. Truman offered, "I know I make a

difference in the lives of other people because they tell me. That, of course, is what makes it rewarding, that you are really being helpful to somebody."

Benjamin said that he knew he had "done something that they (the children) will always appreciate. They will always remember. And I will try to help different people and touch the hearts of other people." Delia talked about approaching her service with an attitude that will make a difference for others. "If you are angry and hateful inside, it shows to the people around you and it impacts them. But if you are filled with love and kindness, you cannot help but extend that." And Sara shared, "When we all help each other, it relieves some of the burden of living and we can start to focus on changing other things."

About her work on health care reform, Sara said:

I do it because I feel that it is an area where I can put my efforts and really make a difference in people's lives, human lives. Some days I don't feel like I am making a difference. It is very grueling and emotionally draining. But I meet people all the time who remind me of why I am doing it.

And Brenda shared that "if you could get everyone committed to service just one or two hours, helping anybody, it would make such a difference in the world."

Making a Difference for Other Individuals

Making a difference for others was often expressed through physical touch and by providing simple care, food and lots of patience. A simple response by Benjamin reflected his real concern for the needs of others when

he took his eight year old son to a downtown neighborhood where they fed the poor from the back of his truck:

Around 15th and 16th Streets, down by the homeless shelter, we fed people out of the back of my truck. It was like, when you first drove up, there were maybe five or six of them. And then later, it's like they came out of the woodwork. They just came and we fed them.

Delia shared a story about her work at a homeless shelter and her simple efforts to care for one of the shelter's clients and to respond to his need for medical attention and basic comfort:

I was working at the clinic and a man came in. He had sores all over him, but was calm and asked for help. I remember putting compresses on him so we could medicate the sores in a soak. Here is this man who is sleeping out on the street and is cold and he is uncomfortable, and I had to cover large portions of his body with this solution. I was touched by his calmness and control and gentleness, that in spite of losing his job, being on the street, and having these problems, he was still rather peaceful. Another man came in with a serious infection on both heels, ankles and feet. I had to wash his feet and dress them and get vouchers for shoes and socks. I got him a pass to stay for a while until his wounds healed.

Randa spoke of the many simple tasks she performed for others in response to the needs she encountered at the hospice where she volunteered:

I would hold his head up while the home health aide washed his hair with a special portable sink. I would help turn him over and bathe him. It

takes a lot of patience to feed these people, because their tastebuds have gone. The medication and everything. So when I am feeding them I encourage them and take my time, whereas the nurses might have four or five other patients to care for and cannot take the time they would like to take. I stay with the patient, or visit with the families if that's what they want. I feel devoted to this work. I wouldn't have stayed with it this long if I didn't feel the devotion.

Benjamin's eight year old son, who shared the interview experience with Benjamin, bragged about his father's efforts to help others when he said, "One time my Dad saw this lady and her kid who were homeless. So he went into McDonald's and bought some hamburgers for her." Benjamin nodded his head as his son spoke and then talked about his own response to the woman's need for food:

That's no way for kids to grow up, on the streets. That goes through their whole lives until they are adults. They stay with you, I know. She had a little girl with her. I could see her daughter was hungry. She asked me for money to feed the girl. So I went into McDonald's and ordered hamburgers for them both.

Randa described other episodes with patients when her touch made a difference:

I would mostly touch. I sat there and held his hand. It didn't matter what was going on in the house, my purpose was to be there for him. One evening this one fellow was talking and it was something about the way he looked and I said, Steve, would you like a hug. He didn't say

anything, and we just really hugged, really tight, and when I stood back, he said, how did you know I needed that. And I said, well. . . . Another time I told a family that I just wanted to come and visit their brother who was dying. They said, "Great, we would love that." I walked into his bedroom and that handshake just filled me with really neat feelings, too.

Eddie shared some of his experiences in reaching out and touching people at the neighborhood community center where he volunteered in an effort to show them that he cared about them:

I pat them on the shoulder, and after a while the women kiss me and hug me and I tell them how much I love them and what they mean to me to come in here and say those things to me. Some say I could get charged with sexual harassment for doing that. And I say, well, I am willing to pay that price to let them know I love them. And when I touch them, I know how to touch them and they know what that touch means. I am 67 years old. I know how to touch a woman or a man. I kiss men, too. Are they gonna get me for sexual harassment? (hearty laughter)

Jerry also reflected on his use of physical touch as he reached out to help others:

My work puts me in that place where I have more of an opportunity to use touch. And I do. I use it as a tool and I think of it as a tool. I have to connect with people. So it's a tool. For me it's very natural to use touch. As long as you are sincere in using it appropriately. Touch is very important to me. People need to be OK to shake hands and pat each other on the back and hug. There is such a negative connotation.

Sometimes it's seen as a sexual thing. But it's part of my work. Like the time I hugged that lady in the hospital lobby. I felt she was in pain and needed a hug. Or the time I patted that guy on the shoulder at an AA meeting because I saw that he was hurting. He came up to me a year later at another AA meeting. I didn't recognize him as someone I knew, but he told me that I had changed his life. He reminded me that I had put my hand on his shoulder a year before, trying to let him know that it was going to be OK. He came back to thank me for that gesture. Something about that encounter gave him hope.

Truman recounted an experience when he touched another physically, and was in turn touched emotionally by the experience:

One time I was at the home of a man who was going to die very shortly. He had said to those in the room, I am going to die now! I am going to die. And we called the nurse and chaplain and told them to hurry because it looked like the man was going to die right then. I was by the bed holding his hand, and the nurse came in and the chaplain prayed with him. (starts to laugh) And everybody got to be kind of awkward, standing around waiting for him to die (more laughter). After a while he said, well, I guess it's not going to happen now. So everybody went home and it was kind of an anti-climax (laughs more). It was very touching. He finally died, of course, but not that day.

After discussing the death penalty issue with a young woman during a human rights rally, Thomas shared his thoughts about what a difference their conversation had made in her thinking about capital punishment. "She was

about 21 and not educated, but she really learned some facts that night. She said it really has changed her being there for an hour, changed the way she was thinking." Eddie shared a story about his work with gang members and the impact he had on two particularly troublesome young men:

How come I can go up to those gang member and the chief of police can't? And I don't talk to them good and nice. I say, you caused your own damn problems, boy. So go and straighten them out so you will make us all happy. I am able to change some of them. This kid I was telling you about. I changed him from daylight to dark. He is now just a good man, someone you would want around you, even you. If you were getting off the bus, you wouldn't mind him escorting you home, because you would feel safe with him. And we have a guy here who is crippled and disoriented in his vocabulary and he walks bad. When he came in here he was a bad actor. And when Mr. Eddie got a hold of him. . . he has changed 80%. That Black man will be able to assume all of his responsibilities in America and he will get respect. See, so it's something different lady! What we are doing now don't work, so let's try some other methods. Get some other way of doing what we need for our community.

Jonathan spoke about a case on which his human rights group worked for many months. Jonathan and the group received information about a particular prisoner for whom the group was advocating and writing letters to foreign government officials. That information revealed to them that, after the first hundred letters about the prisoner, officials gave the prisoner back his pants. When the next hundred letters were received, the officials gave the

prisoner back his bed. When the next hundred letters were received, the prisoner was called to the front office and was told he would receive no more torture. Ultimately the prisoner was released. Jonathan was excited about the fact that political pressure did work in that particular case, as it had in many other cases over the years, and that the group was able to learn such detailed information about a case, which was usually more difficult to obtain.

Making a Difference for Society

The impact of moral commitment and selfless service often ranged beyond participants' immediate lives and made a difference for entire communities and for society in general. Sara shared, "I am now working on health care reform. . . It is an area where I can put my efforts and really make a difference. And even though it seems like a policy issue, it really is dealing with people's lives." She gave a concrete example of how her efforts could make a difference. "I think of men and women working long hours and their children are with baby-sitters. It (guaranteed health care) would increase family time and increase time for people to communicate."

Eddie felt strongly about his desire that societal change should occur. "With my plan, we are talking about putting the people to work that you put in prison and let them raise their own family and educate them so that they don't make the same mistakes that society made them make." In talking about why she chose to live in an inner city neighborhood which would be the most affected by the health care reform for which she worked, Sara said:

It's really about people's lives. If we fail, how many people we are

letting down. That's why it is important for me to remind myself and live in an area where there are families and children playing in the street every day and roller skating down the street or pulling the skateboard behind a bicycle with a rope and playing stickball and all the stuff that made up the American family in the 50's. It is still actually going on and people are still making those kinds of lives for themselves.

One of Thomas's missions was to educate the public about the death penalty:

That's the main thing. It's the education we can provide. If we can show people an option to the death penalty, life in prison without parole, which does exist. For several years, no one has been paroled who had that sentence. There were thousands of them. People don't know that, or don't want to think that. So I tend to get into arguments. But I don't like to argue about it.

Delia shared her thoughts on the economic impact to our society she hoped to have through some of her activities:

We have educational classes, prenatal classes to get women through their pregnancies, high risk women. It's an investment in the economics of giving health care. It's cheaper to deliver healthy babies than to save sick babies. It's like immunization. It's more cost effective to immunize than it is to treat.

Thomas described the effectiveness of letter campaigns waged by the human rights organization for which he volunteered in changing the policies of foreign governments. "You can't expect to see results right away. You just

know that things will change. We also have an effect on the other citizens of the country because the word gets out that our group is working on a case."

He also said:

It (the letter campaigns) really makes them stop and think. It is actually a guilt inducing process. And not just guilt. They know that a lot of other people know, and their reasons for doing this (torture and unjustified incarceration) is because it is in secret. All of a sudden, it's in public and can be responded to by the government or the press. In some cases they have to think twice about what they are doing. It has an effect on the other citizens of the country because the word gets out that we are working on a case.

Jonathan, who worked with a similar organization, discussed putting pressure on foreign leaders so that they would adopt more civilized human rights policies and practices. He believed that he and his group could really make a difference and that the world could be a much better place if selfish dictators could be persuaded to release unjustly accused prisoners. Jonathan cared deeply that activities of his human rights group appealed to governmental decision makers who had the power over life and death, and that it was possible to drag countries and regimes kicking and screaming into being more civilized in their approach toward the human rights of their citizens. His group had been so effective in certain instances, that certain foreign governments tended not to imprison as many of their own citizens or as often.

Speaking passionately about the potential impact of her work, Sara felt her efforts created a sense of empowerment for the poor and middle classes

who have little political voice or power to bring about substantive changes in their lives:

One of the things I did before the ballot initiative. I gave presentations to groups about health care. I would get into more lengthy discussions. People are hungry for information. I appeal to people that with this (initiative) they will have more say, they don't have to wait for some policy hack in Washington, D.C., to decide how the system will be. That is an empowering thing for people. . . .If we could relieve some of the burden so people start looking at their families and then broaden that to the global family. You could really capture people's imagination and have a revolution of the mind.

And Eddie spoke defiantly about influencing the political power structure as he saw it:

People are people. So the gangs, they have no way of moving forward unless someone clears the brush for them to move through. If it was left up to me, I would say, "Here White people, you gonna have to treat us right. I don't care if you call us bigot or what you do to us. You gonna have to prepare our people for jobs. You gonna have to teach them to retool and retrain all of our people to be men and women and give 'em something to live for, instead of fighting for a piece of bread for the rest of their lives. Teach them how to grow the wheat themselves."

Some participants spoke of campaigns and efforts as if they were truly fighting battles. Jonathan talked about country-wide campaigns which bombarded other countries in the world engaging in human rights abuses with

barrages of letters appealing to their leaders to stop the abuses. Some campaigns would last for months or years before action was taken by foreign powers. The supply of ammunition in the form of letters was endless. And since the battle was one-sided, letter campaigns could go on uninterrupted until a resolution (victory) of human rights cases were achieved.

Sara spoke not only of campaigning in the streets to collect signatures, she wanted a sort of social revolution, or transformation in public thinking, to occur:

I know I have to count how many signatures we got yesterday and go out and get more. I also know that we only have 60 more days to do this and I am driven by the fact that I am either going to win or lose this. To me it's an all or nothing thing and really about people's lives. If we could relieve some of the burden so people start looking at their families and then broaden that to the global family. You could really capture people's imagination and have a revolution of the mind. That's the kind of world I hope we are heading towards. For the first time as a society we could agree as a group to take care of each other. It will capture people's hearts and imaginations to possibly go beyond that to the next step and into another area.

Sara described her efforts and those of others to work for social reform and greater political empowerment for others in society. Her remarks reflected intentionality as well as the concrete efforts of her struggle to reform society. "We are all working towards something and we may not see it. But each little tiny, tiny piece that we put out there is being built on and another

piece gets passed on and eventually it will add up to something really substantial."

And finally, Brenda shared her action plan for community service, saying, "If everybody in the city could do some community service each week, it would be a completely different city. If you could get everyone committed. When they start helping they feel more responsible and can make a difference."

Psychic Rewards

Psychic rewards for selfless service were felt by all participants. For some it was the satisfaction of having done a job well, of having influenced a troubled teenager, or of having received news of a prisoner release. They described these rewards as feelings in the "heart," as fun, as personal growth, as unsolicited appreciation and, for some, literally as a means to their own survival as persons. Psychic rewards were sometimes felt while they were engaged in good works, and often also were experienced after the "work" was done or the service was provided. The rewards frequently served as motivation for the performance of more service to those in need and were not merely by-products of moral commitment. Psychic rewards, or "psychic income" as Delia described, were not expected or predicted by participants, and often came as a surprise.

Psychic income is also a powerful metaphor for the internal experience of those engaged in selfless service to others, an experience occurring in the mind, spirit, or heart of the participants. Participants' experiences of psychic

reward seemed to transcend the physical, and the impact was occasionally transformative, as in increased self esteem, new feelings of "empowerment" and feeling "closer to God." Some participants, however, felt dissociated from mainstream society or frustrated by their experiences of serving others, even as they experienced great satisfaction from their good works. Delia masterfully defined psychic income, saying:

Grace comes to us and fills us. It pours out of God's generosity to us.

Psychic income to me includes that indwelling, that receipt of grace, but it also is the personal satisfaction. When you put on an event and it was a success, or you taught a class well, you know in your heart that you have "done good." And that is psychic income. I don't need a paycheck to prove to me that I did a good job. My children are relatively well adjusted adults, my husband hasn't left yet, he still thinks he likes me (hearty laughter). So I must be doing something right. You don't shoot for the psychic income, but it ends up happening, that good feeling.

Delia's receipt of psychic income was an unanticipated, yet clearly felt and real, result of her good works. It obviated the need for monetary reward, payment or gain for labor or services rendered. Experiencing and knowing that she had performed good works for others was its own reward. As with a monetary investment, psychic income often was multiplied many times over. Delia said, "The satisfaction is just dynamite. It's psychic income. It's an income that can't be taxed, can't be stolen. You earn it, forever. And it does keep you warm at night. It does help you sleep. And with money, you can't."

Psychic rewards helped to sustain motivation throughout participants'

service and for some provided the motivation to engage in more service. Randa said, "The energy comes and I feel needed. It's like a rotating thing. Then I fill up and then I need to go again. It's not just me either. It's everyone who works here with me." And Delia said, "The psychic income is awesome. I love what I do. A lot of variety. If I get tired of it, I don't do it again. If I like it, I volunteer to re-up. I have been able to do as many creative and challenging things as any corporate woman. I have carried every bit as much responsibility and didn't have to punch a time clock or pay taxes. It is total freedom."

Feelings

Intense feelings accompanied service to others, touching participants deeply and often unexpectedly. These emotional rewards included feelings of joy, fullness of heart, accomplishment, peace, fun, anger and frustration, empathy and closeness to God. Eager to share her feelings about her efforts to feed an elderly Alzheimer's patient, Randa said, "She looked at me with the most beautiful twinkle in her eye. She was so cute, and as confused as she was, you can imagine how I felt when she got that twinkle in her eye and winked at me." Benjamin's feeling about his work was in his heart. "The reason I do it is the feeling I get in my heart. Just knowing that I have done good for people. I never had that opportunity as a child. Just knowing that you have touched someone who really needs the help. I get a tremendous feeling." Benjamin also expressed what he received when he gave out food to the homeless:

Watching the faces of the people who come in and they are hungry and the blessing you gave them then by giving that little bit of food. The thanks they give you. It's a tremendous feeling when they are walking through there. I mean, they are hungry, you see it in their faces, they are starving!

About being emotionally touched by her work in different ways, Sara said:

I come home from signature gathering and say to my husband, I hope I can pick who gets health care, because some of these people are so nasty. But that's not what I believe. I just get frustrated and angry and have days when I am just really pissed off and days when I am really touched. And days when I cry. I have it all.

Some participants described "feeling good" or "having a good feeling" about doing good for others. Sara said, "I have it all. It is learning and feeling like a human being. Part of being alive, part of the human experience." Brenda shared, "I wanted to teach the children a loving and caring God. It's the most powerful thing I do in my life. It's one hour a week. And I tell you, after that one hour, I come home and I feel so good." Benjamin offered, "I have a good feeling when I come home and feel like I have accomplished something. When I do these things, I feel good inside." Jerry shared, "There is an immediate feel good when you have done some good. But I think that immediate feel good is kind of like eating. It's a short term feel good."

Randa struggled to describe in more detail that good feeling she received from her service work, saying:

I fill up inside. My heart fills up when I am doing my work here and this is how I get my rewards. I get a feeling inside of me that is very difficult to put into words. I just feel warm inside and it just makes me feel good. It makes me feel good inside and out. And that same feeling, I get it when I come here (to the hospice facility) or go see my hospice family.

Some reflected on a feeling of joy or enjoyment when they spoke of their service to others. Sara said, "I want people to have that right and to have the blessings and the joys that I have had." Brenda said, "Living the way I live is a joy, but there are times when I feel like I am sacrificing. . . . I really felt compelled to do that (teach children a loving God), and I really enjoy it."

Truman talked about empathizing with the patients he helps. He had experienced some of the same things and feelings as his patients. "It was just that I knew exactly how he felt. There was nothing behind his eyes, there was nothing there for him." He added, tears rolling down his face, "There is her husband who she is taking care of, and if she dies, what happens to him. She is in terrible shape herself. I can sympathize with her, but I don't dwell on it. Nothing I can do about it." In discussing how he felt when patients he was helping actually died, Truman said, "So actually I am just very happy for them when they do die. I feel more for the survivors than for the ones who do die. I can identify with them."

Sara expressed feelings of empowerment and empathy that accompanied her work:

I have become empowered to express myself more. Now sometimes I feel the most empowered when I am in a room of people who are feeling

what I used to feel. That frustration and lack of ability to express that frustration. A little bit of knowledge has really helped with that empowerment. It is important to me to have good information about what I feel strongly about. I have a lot more ability to not feel that frustration and to have an exchange without feeling that way. The knowledge has empowered me. This work has really empowered me. It feels empowering. It's made me a stronger woman.

Benjamin expressed feelings of accomplishment about his work with children:

I feel like I have done something, accomplished something. Knowing that you get a tremendous feeling when you come home after working 14 or 16 hours at an event. You come home and say, all right, I have done something for someone today that they will always appreciate. They will always remember.

Participants also described other feelings as a result of their experiences in service to others. Brenda explained that she felt a transcendent feeling. "It always seems to help you more than someone else because it takes you out of yourself." She added, "It's like when you do what you should and live your life the way you should, people want that. When people see that you have this inner peace, people want that. It's attraction, rather than promotion." Randa expressed another of her feelings this way, "I feel closer to God than I ever had." And Sara offered, "All the people I work with are good people. I feel blessed." Jerry expressed these feelings about an unexpected experience which happened as a result of his reaching out and touching someone a year before

the unexpected experience:

It came out of the blue. I didn't expect anything back from that. To get something back from that. I just know that when he came over and talked to me, I probably really needed that boost from him. So not only was it not only something that came out of the blue and something that I was not trying to get anything out of. It probably came at a time when I really needed that boost.

Some participants expressed feeling different, odd or alienated about their service to others. Brenda implied she felt different and better after her time spent teaching religion to children. She said, "I walk out of the classroom and feel like a different person. You can't get that feeling another way. You can't get it from drugs, from shopping or anyone's way of making them feel better." Delia said others might perceive her to be unusual, an outsider or a loner:

I don't like to reveal all about me to others. But if they find out that I ride motorcycles and kayak and whitewater raft, they say, you actually go to that clinic and work with people with all those germs and stuff. Or, isn't that a scary place, don't you worry about being mugged. At cocktail parties I have some very interesting conversations. I am an odd duck. I do things that your Debbie Domestic just doesn't do. I often feel like I am in a moat outside, with the alligators, saying help! But I found that there are a lot of other crazy people like me. (She laughed heartily at this point)

Thomas shared that he felt dissociated from those in his life who did not

share his beliefs:

I would say I am kind of not in the mainstream about the things I think about on a daily basis. I am not into sports and network TV or read People magazine. I am aware of that. I am extremely aware of that. So I think I kind of put myself apart from the population in a lot of ways and at the same time that doesn't bother me. I have a way of thinking that I believe in. But, again, it has ostracized me from a lot of the population, which I accept. But at time, it becomes a strange consciousness, a strange distance.

Some participants expressed feelings of fun and excitement, and even a sense of humor, about their service. Randa said:

I volunteer for the USO too and I feel fulfilled there. It's a neat balance, because with hospice, it's more a serious thing, even though we do joke about some things there. No one could handle it if it was serious all the time. Most of the time it's a lot of fun. . . . When these kids come in to the USO, they are so cute, and their eyes are bright and shiny and they look so cute in their uniforms. It's a lot of fun.

Sara offered, "For the most part it's positive and fun." And Benjamin said:

I did bike rides in the park, casino nights, bowlathons and baseball tournaments. A lot of events. They are fun events. Sometimes when I am there I do an impression of Donald Duck for the kids and before the day was over all the little Black kids and the Mexican boys and girls would come and say how do you do that. And I would say nothing, and

just teach them how to do it. It's a lot of fun.

Delia offered:

Like when you are teaching religion and the kids really get involved and they start asking questions and they are good questions. And they set you up for what you really wanted to teach them in the first place. To know that something clicks that was positive and beneficial, that something happened. It's a fun game. . . . I was quite nervous when I took over as president of my auxiliary and I love it. I have had so much fun. I get more than rewarded for what I do. I have such a good time. It's a hell of a fun way to live.

Truman told about recent enjoyable experiences he had in counseling a man whose wife had died and a man with a terminal illness:

Now I am caregiving for a guy who is an author. He has had 25 books published. He and I have a background in education and we have a great time. With my second patient I had who had Parkinson's, he was a delightful old guy. Old guy! He was about the same age as I was, but we got to talking and he had some great tales to tell.

Truman also talked about how difficult it was for him to accept something in return for his giving to others. Yet he felt comfortable with others giving to him because he realized the importance of allowing others to be able to give as he had:

I would rather they didn't shower me with gratitude. Actually, I give better than I receive. Most people do. Lots of times they will try to give me some money for gas and, of course, I refuse that absolutely, but if it's

a gift, I wouldn't refuse it. And then I am appreciative of it and glad that they thought about doing it. That seems to be part of the helping that I do. You have to allow people to reciprocate if they would like to. In a sense it's like the way things should work. You give something and you get something. In any relationship that's the way it should work. In marriage or in business. You put something out and you get something in return. Here I am putting out service and getting satisfaction in return.

Personal Growth

Personal growth, a special type of psychic reward, accrued to participants during and after their exercise of moral commitment to serve others, bringing special meaning to their service. These psychic, and very personal, rewards included experiencing freedom, enjoying improved personal relationships, receiving recognition for their service, appreciating deeper meaning in life, establishing rich friendships and a sense of community and being aware that life was worth living. For a few, their efforts to help others in need provided them with a feeling of personal and psychic survival which turned negative or unhappy life circumstances into meaningful and life-saving experiences.

Thomas was conscious of the personal growth he experienced when he said:

I have developed. I tend not to be complacent. I feel responsible in some way as a citizen. Everything people say or things I read, I try to

analyze it. That's become a habit, I guess. And now I am just a little more cautious and a little more subtle about what I say. It's improving my relationships with people in general and I also think I am able to get a little more across.

Jerry turned his life over to God and, as a result, the fear of death abated. "It felt just phenomenal. And I felt like because I had reached that point that my life was going to be changed forever." Truman said, simply, "The value it has for me is that it makes my life worth living." And Eddie, who was supposed to be "black dog blind about eight years ago," can see. "I can see a bit. I believe that is part of my reward, by being good to other people." Eddie also said that his commitment and service had meaning for him, although it may not have meaning for others, "I have a lot to offer and so small a chance to distribute what I have to offer. What I do still means something to me, but very little for them." Randa said, "I feel everybody has a sense of purpose, and one of my purposes right now is to be of service. It makes me feel worthwhile and gives me purpose." Sara spoke of the personal strength her work has brought her when she said:

I feel more strength and more ability to challenge standard thought or a newspaper article or someone who says they are an expert. I used to think that I can't speak on issues because I don't have a Ph.D., or I haven't read the latest. I don't feel that anymore. This work has made me a stronger woman.

Some spoke about the freedom they experienced in service to others. Randa said, "They treat us with respect here. And there is an element of

freedom in being a volunteer. They can't deduct my pay for being gone for a couple of days." She also offered, "There is such freedom and I feel closer to God than I ever had." Delia said, "I love what I do. A lot of variety. If I get tired of it, I don't do it again. I have been able to do as many creative and challenging things as any corporate woman. It is total freedom." And finally Sara shared that, as a result of her experiences, she was "not caring so much what other people think of me and not running my life based on what other people think of me. It is really freeing."

Two participants shared the impact that service to others had on their sense of self esteem. Benjamin said:

Even when I was a kid I was always rejected. I felt like the black sheep of the family. That still carries with me. To this day I still have low self esteem and to me, by helping these people, it helps me bring my self esteem up a little bit. Helping them helps me.

And Brenda offered:

Whatever I give, I get more back than what I have given. The way I feel about myself, the self esteem it gives me, the self esteem it gives my children. I was just talking to someone in crisis and they said, thank you for listening, I really needed someone. It always seems to help you more than someone else.

For some participants, observing and being a bystander in the lives of other people gave meaning to their service to others. Randa shared a story about helping a woman whose husband had just died:

I am sharing this so you can see what a reward I get. Her husband had

just passed away and she needed help with his belongings to take out to the car. So I got a cart and was standing there waiting. And she reached over and put her hand on top of his, and (Randa choked back tears), it was beautiful. She put her hand there, how much she loved him. She said she was going to miss him and started to. . . then I said I'll wait for you outside, so she could be in private. Here I am in tears, but it's just so beautiful.

Sara shared a similar story:

I go out everyday and try to collect signature for this ballot initiative. And I meet people every day who tell me a story about their lives and what is happening to them, about what the lack of health care has done to them and to their families. I go to different locations and get different types of people. I get a lot of middle class folks, career people. And another thing, I have learned never to judge. Wealthy and poor like the initiative. There have been poor people who have a disdain for other poor people. That is one thing I learned, that our society believes that even if we are at the bottom of the heap, we believe there is someone lower than us and someone worse off and someone who we can dismiss or almost hate. Also, I get a chance to be around people who are homeless, who have been in prison or who have had bad breaks.

Some participants developed friendships and closeness to the persons whom they helped or to the persons with whom they worked. Randa felt the sense of community that her service brought to her when she said, "There is a closeness that develops here. You are just a member of the family. That is the

way I feel. I get very involved with the families." Sara described the value for her of working within a community of like-minded individuals when she offered:

It feels good. It feels like I have a real community of friends, people I can really turn to when there is a crisis, people I could really lean on, people who really care about me and like me for who I am and don't think I should be a certain way. I am learning a lot just talking to you and thinking this through.

Recognition of their service was an unsolicited personal and psychic reward received by some participants and fought off by others. Brenda had to "fight the temptation to get up and strut around" for recognition of her good works for others. Delia said, "I am not doing this for an ego trip. Certainly I like being recognized and I like to feel good about myself and I like other people to think well of me." Benjamin also shared his enjoyment of the recognition he received for his service and struggled to express what it meant to him:

Some days you feel you aren't being recognized. But then you are down there to help the kids. Without the kids there would be no plaques on my wall. Without the smiles on their faces, those plaques would mean nothing. . . . When I made volunteer of the year and they started reading a list of things I had done. And I knew it was me and I started balling, crying like a baby. And they gave me a standing ovation and I wanted to say so many things. But the emotion I was in, I just said, this means so much to me.

Benjamin also shared that acts of service helped to fill some of his personal needs, as well as teach important lessons to his son, when he said, "I

got so much love through MDA and they made me feel like I was really wanted. So, in turn, I felt it would make me feel better to help as many people as I could. And my son has learned a lot from helping the people in wheel chairs."

Sara expressed that she received more from her service than did those she hoped to help:

One thing I learned recently is that it is not all selfless because I am getting more out of it than I am giving. I hope I am giving something valuable, and I am doing it because I really do care about issues and about people, but I keep doing it because I am getting something out of it, more than I ever thought I would. I don't want to feel that pain anymore. In a way it's very selfish.

Some participants spoke about how their service to others had actually helped them continue to live. Truman said:

The value it has for me is that it makes my life worth living because I don't work anymore and I have no one who is dependent on me. And when I went to bed at night, I would think, why was I here today, why live at all. And as I say, it's for a selfish motive. The reason I think of other people is that it can do something for me. If it does some good for somebody else, great. But I am doing it for myself.

Jerry said, "For me the service cycle or the effort to stay out of the self centered behavior becomes a real necessity. It becomes a life line, otherwise you fall back into old behavior." He included the assistance given him by others in his assessment of the meaning of service in his life. "I believe I couldn't make it through my day without other people doing that for me. Little

gestures that I appreciate, or big gestures. We have been helped a lot."

Sara shared, "One of the reasons this is a remarkable thing in my life, is because it has pushed me out of the fear. That has been a saving thing for me. It has actually saved my life." She added, "it means growth and living, feeling alive."

Summary

This chapter presented findings from the interviews with this study's ten participants according to major themes extracted from the interview accounts. An attempt was made to enlighten the reader about the essential elements of the phenomenological description of moral commitment presented earlier in this chapter. Discussion of these findings occurs in Chapter Six. Discussion of the findings as they relate to previous research and recommendations to researchers for further study based on the findings of this study are presented in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion of the Findings

General Discussion

As revealed by this study's participants, the phenomenon of moral commitment is an evolutionary human process of overlapping action and reflection, and of lived experience and understanding. Moral commitment usually develops as an extension of one's past experiences and core beliefs, and can develop as a reaction against certain forces and experiences in the lives of the morally committed. In this way, moral commitment is embedded within the context of the lives of those serving, becoming an extension and even a fulfillment of past experiences and influences. Various beliefs, persons, education, religious training (or lack of), belief in God, family influences and life experiences combine to prepare one for and move one to experience moral commitment. In some, moral commitment is an extension of well-entrenched beliefs and family experiences and in others, it develops and functions as a reaction against abusive or conservative backgrounds or significant other persons.

The type of service is often a reflection of, and is influenced by, past experiences. For example, an adult abused as a child is drawn to work with

underprivileged and sick children. A widower of a cancer victim wants to counsel cancer patients and their families. The son of missionaries chooses to work through a church to aid homeless men and migrant workers. And the adult who was protected as a child reaches out to the needy in very unfamiliar settings.

As one grows in awareness of the needs of others, one begins to commit oneself to serve others, either making a conscious choice to serve, or acting out of a compelling force to serve or help others in some manner. Persons experiencing moral commitment typically involve and view others as the focus of or recipients of that commitment, yet personal or intimate relationships with those others do not usually develop as a result of service to them. It is essential to the morally committed that they attempt to make a difference in the lives of other human beings on global, national, local community or personal levels. Whether their efforts are successful, or whether certain impacts are felt by others, is of less importance to the committed. However, moral commitment does not exist in a vacuum and does require others for its enactment and hopefully for its fulfillment.

Whether or not moral commitment as demonstrated through service to others begins as the result of a well-reasoned choice, or as a compulsion or emotional response, it typically becomes a way of life for the committed person. Moral commitment may assume an importance in their lives equal to that of their families, friends, marriage, career or job, developing to such a point that it becomes an essential part of their lives. In fact, it becomes a way of life to the degree that they experience inner struggles or conflicts between moral

commitment and service, and another area or areas of life. This struggle may take the form of frustration or guilt over things not done in some other areas of their lives because the moral commitment and service to others have assumed prominence or temporary priority. The frustration or conflict may be between a desire for recognition and the belief that one's service should be selfless, and therefore go unrecognized. Or the conflict may be between hope for and despair over the objects of one's commitment, or even between selfless and what were described by some participants as selfish motives - - the value of helping versus the good feeling which helping creates in the helper.

There is always a type of "psychic income," or psychic reward, that derives to the morally committed as a result of their service to others. During and as a result of their service, and while reflecting upon their service to others, morally committed persons experience intense feelings such as joy, empathy, anger, love, empowerment, fullness of heart, satisfaction, and freedom of spirit. These feelings serve to sustain their interest in continuing to serve others. In discussing their service, most individuals will reflect these intense feelings in their faces, especially in the eyes, and in their voices. Eyes may fill with tears, voices laugh or crack, and chins quiver, as they relay stories about their lives, moral commitments and experiences of serving others.

Moral commitment is truly a process, from development of concern for others based on previous life experiences, to a decision or compulsion to serve others, eventually becoming a way of life which includes internal conflict over multiple commitments, intense feelings, and efforts to involve others in those commitments.

Participants used a variety of rich words to describe their understandings of moral commitment and what that commitment meant to them. The following phrases from participants are arranged according to the major themes from Chapter Five:

1. A Way of Life:

It's a job that needs doing.

The chain, cycle and flow of commitment.

A compelling force.

It is a conscious choice.

I have to do this, I have no choice.

It's the reasonable thing to do.

It's the most powerful thing I do in my life.

It is work I can do that I believe in.

It's a calling, we need you.

I had to do this work, I had no choice.

God is my partner.

I am Christ's hands.

I am God's pencil.

It's strictly how one person treats another.

I am a conduit for God.

Religion is hypocrisy if you don't live it.

I am a servant.

God didn't think I needed a job, so He took care of that.

My reason for living is God needs me to do these things.

It's about bringing God into our lives.

2. Making a Difference:

Making others happy.

Having a community more loving than the one you were born into.

Being part of a team of helpers, a great corps of people.

Everybody should do something for someone else.

Compelled to act for the powerless.

I had to help someone else in my life.

3. Psychic Rewards:

Feeling different.

The getting is in the giving.

It has saved my life.

Helping them helps me.

The price is worth it.

It makes living worthwhile.

It makes me feel warm inside and fills me up.

Participant Differences

Although phenomenological methodology does not require the reporting of differences in study participants, or of features which distinguish one group of participants from another, mention of such differences may be of interest to some readers. In reviewing the participants' descriptions and understandings of moral commitment, it became clear that there were very few age and gender

differences in those interviewed. Males and females were equally divided as to their religious beliefs playing a role in the development and enactment of their moral commitment. Concern for fair treatment and justice for the oppressed of the world, and feelings of care and compassion for others in need, were no more evident in one gender or age group than in another. All ages (from 33 to 78 years of age) and both genders experienced inner conflicts as a result of their moral commitments and service. These conflicts did not abate for older participants, nor for those in service to others for 50 years, versus those helping for three or four years. However, inner conflict between personal recognition and selflessness of service was more of an issue for the younger participants than for those in their 60's and 70's. This appeared to be the only difference between, or distinguishing characteristic of, the study's older and younger participants.

Discussion of Major Themes

In this section I will discuss the themes or patterns which I determined were essential to participants' understanding of their experiences of moral commitment and which were included in the phenomenological description of moral commitment in Chapter Five. These themes are "A Way of Life," "Making a Difference" and "Psychic Rewards."

A Way of Life

It became clear during data analysis that moral commitment cannot be separated from the development of participants as persons. Participants

acted out past, and for some, recurring themes and dimensions of their lives in their service activities. The focus of their moral commitments and service tended to be types of persons who, or groups which, held significance for the participants. The types of service in which they engaged also tended to be related to past experiences and beliefs in their lives. It seemed no accident that most participants described their commitments as a "way of life," or as something they "just had to do." The compelling force they experienced and decisions they made moved them to act within the context of their lives to help others. They sought to serve in ways fitting and characteristic of their past lives and experiences. If one were exposed to certain experiences in the past, that individual tended to seek out similar persons or experiences which offered service opportunities.

Some participants chose or were drawn to service experiences which then became extensions of their identities or earlier life experiences, evolving into a way of life for them. Truman was a happily married man before his wife died. After she died, he took on the role of "survivor," grieving for her, then ultimately became a counselor and "friend" to other bereaved persons. Brenda and Jerry were both alcoholics and drug addicts. As part of their recovery from addiction, they were required to perform service to others. This performance of service became in turn their method and road to further recovery and personal growth. Brenda became a teacher and a builder of a sense of community that she lost years before and Jerry became a clown so he could make others happy.

Others continued to live out or react in the present against those

experiences which helped to form them as children and even as adults. Their lives became motivation for their service. Moral commitment grew from their own experiences, perceptions, families, feelings and desires. It was not something given to them, pushed upon them or manufactured by them for the sake of appearances or for social acceptance. Moral commitment was them.

Randa was an unfulfilled former housewife who was unable to be there for her father when he died of cancer. She volunteered to comfort dying patients and became "God's partner" and angel of mercy for those she helped. Eddie was a poor, uneducated blue collar worker who grew up in the segregated South. He became an intermediary between two cultures, Black and White, and teacher, role model, enabler and guide for his own people. Thomas was a quiet youth concerned about the rights of the innocent and unjustly accused. As an adult he became a persistent and dedicated voice for the oppressed and unjustly incarcerated of the world. Jonathan was a child of foreign missionaries who became a voice for justice and mercy, and an advocate of global human rights.

Benjamin reacted against a cruel, neglected upbringing to become a man who had to make children happy by clowning, teaching and playing with them, and by trying to be a child again himself. Sara was a protected youth and fearful young adult who confronted her fears to become a social worker, community builder, visionary, revolutionary and fighter, in very unfamiliar circumstances. And finally, Delia reacted against her childhood abuse by an alcoholic parent and became a selfless "servant" of God, "Christ's hands," "a pencil in God's hands," a nurse to the homeless and a multi-talented helper and

professional volunteer.

All participants mentioned God, belief in God, religious faith, religious training, a higher power or a spiritual force (or lack of such) in some manner. For some, God currently held a prominent place in their lives, and for others, God and religion were part of their past. Most participants experienced some degree of religious training or exposure as children and youth and some talked about their fundamentalist upbringing. A few even had fathers or relatives who were clergy and missionaries. The phrase, "God is my partner," reflects strong spiritual and religious meanings and elements in the lives of several of the study's participants. Participants used a rich variety of words to describe their connection and closeness to God:

"I am Christ's hands," "God's pencil," "God's partner," "a servant," "a conduit." "Religion is hypocrisy if you don't live it." "God needs me to do these things." "It's a calling." "Bring God into our lives." "God didn't think I needed a job, so He took care of it." "You are blessed by helping others." "Religion is how we treat others." "God needs me to do these things." "God pays my wages and puts me in these positions."

Most participants described their strong feelings about how people treat one another. They spoke of feeling compelled or of choosing to help care for and treat others as they would want to be treated (their interpretation of the Golden Rule). For some, treating others compassionately, fairly and justly, serving God by helping others who are needy or unjustly persecuted, and developing increased empathy for those who are hurting reflected reactions to hurts or injustices they once endured.

Participants' beliefs in God and in doing good for God, and their fulfillment of a religious or moral obligation to help others, were reflected in how they referred to themselves - - conduit, servant, partner, hands, pencil, guide, instrument and tool. Service to others also meant that a "place in heaven" would be prepared for or guaranteed to those who served God in this life through helping others. Participants' modes of serving others also reflected their beliefs in the religious virtues of justice and mercy. Such roles included nurse, counselor, teacher, comforter, feeder of the poor and revolutionary for social change. Even for those whose formal religious exposure or experience was well in the past, the virtues of justice, compassion and care permeated their activities and their motivations to serve others in the present.

The relational aspect of being God's partner was also a distinguishing factor for most participants. Not only did the words "God is my partner" reveal a relationship to God, but also that a relationship with God meant that the morally committed become "servants" and relate to other humans through acts of justice and mercy, and through compassionate rendering of unsolicited service to others. In this sense God's partners were also His hands, conduits, instruments, tools, pathways to His other creatures in need of His love and care. Action and identity seemed to become one when participants described their roles as God's partners or conduits of his will and love. Belief in the Golden Rule led them to treat others fairly, justly, caringly, mercifully, compassionately and morally. Enactment of their beliefs seemed to be essential to an understanding of their moral commitments.

Making a Difference

The intention and practice of making a difference in the lives of others were essential to the work of all participants. Some worked to effect change on a global or national scale, some worked at the community level, and others on a personal level where they intersected the lives of individuals and families.

Jonathan, Thomas and Sara were laboring through organizations which aimed to bring about large scale social and policy changes, justice and improvements in the lives of persons living hundreds and thousands of miles away. Their ongoing, relentless, long-term struggles for human rights reflected their concern for the human condition, but also their real desire to make a difference in the lives of more than just a few. Jonathan and Thomas, especially, were able to experience the impact of some of their efforts on world leaders, on government officials and on policy which affected the lives of real people. Sara hoped to experience the impact of her efforts and dreamed of "capturing the minds and hearts of the American people" through a revolution of the mind.

Eddie, Brenda and Jerry, and Sara sought to make a difference in their local communities through their efforts to bring people together who could work on common goals to build more than just physical communities, but communities to which people felt they belonged. Eddie did this by physically being there for the poor in his neighborhood and attempting to teach them a better way, his way. Sara moved to a part of the inner city where she wanted to live and where she felt she could make a difference in people's lives. Brenda and Jerry joined the artificially-created community of Alcoholics Anonymous

as a means to survival. Once they were both in a healing process through AA, they each chose to work through a church to build a sense of community that they felt was missing among the church members.

These participants were committed to building community because they believed that participating in activities as a group which had common goals could also effect change in the lives of the community's individuals and families. Brenda, especially, knew the value of community. She had experienced community at a critical point in her own life and wanted that for others.

Benjamin, Truman, Delia and Randa served in order to make a difference in the lives of individuals whom they viewed as needy, hurting, suffering or helpless. Their service reflected caring and compassionate sentiments toward individual fellow human beings. Truman even included himself among those individuals. Helping others helped him survive and deal with his grief.

Caring deeply about the needs and suffering of others, participants sought to make a difference in real peoples' lives. Their efforts to change conditions focused on others as the recipients of their commitments. Some kind of relationship, distant or intimate, to other persons or communities was vital to the exercise of participants' desires and efforts to make others' lives different or better. Again, their moral commitments were not experienced in a vacuum, but were relational and interpersonal.

Psychic Rewards

One participant vividly summarized what acting on moral commitment

meant in her life and what rewards her commitment brought her, calling those rewards "psychic income:"

Grace comes to us and fills us. It pours out of God's generosity to us.

Psychic income to me includes that indwelling, that receipt of grace, but it also is the personal satisfaction. It's an income that can't be taxed or stolen. You earn it forever. And it keeps you warm at night, it does help you sleep. You don't shoot for the psychic income, but it ends up happening, that good feeling.

Psychic income, as Delia just described it, was an automatic reward for her good works. It came unsolicited from God, made her feel good, lasted indefinitely and allowed her to be at peace so she could sleep at night, knowing she had served well.

Moral commitment and its enactment through service always engendered strong feelings and brought certain psychic rewards into participants' lives. Feelings of joy and fulfillment, simple satisfaction, feelings of accomplishment and recognition by others were the most immediate forms of psychic income. Service also affected many participants in ways which changed them as persons. The most potent and reinforcing of those rewards were newly felt empowerment and self esteem, increased empathy for others, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, a sense of service as a survival mechanism, and concrete blessings in their personal lives, such as continued good health.

Although these feelings and rewards were not the initial motivation for engaging in service, psychic income was happily experienced and received, and

served as motivation to sustain their service to others. Jerry spoke of the "cycle of commitment." Psychic income was part of that cycle of "giving and getting."

Throughout the interviews participants' reflections about their experiences brought forth intense emotional responses. Tears, laughter, frowns, raised voices, quivering chins and tables pounded all revealed the intensity of feelings about their service, their motivations and the rewards they were receiving, even as they were being interviewed. In this very real and vivid sense, the lived experience of moral commitment and its understandings were united.

Summary

Although there were large differences in age and life experiences among participants, their understandings of the experience of moral commitment were remarkably similar. They understood that moral commitment reflected their core beliefs and life experiences, and that this commitment developed to become an essential part of themselves and their lives. Understandings of their commitment could not be separated from their beliefs and life experiences. Experience and understanding overlapped and served to support and to sustain each other. Strong moral commitment emerged in these individuals regardless of type of background, yet it was clear that past experiences played a critical role in the development of moral commitment and the type of service, to the degree that moral commitment was embedded within the context and fabric of their lives.

Moral commitment was an experience requiring the presence of others as its focus, becoming not solely a personal experience, but also an interpersonal experience. This interpersonal focus, their desire to serve God and their intent to make a difference in the lives of others were essential to enacting and understanding their moral commitments. Yet, if others' lives were impacted or made different as a result of the participants' moral commitments, that was coincidental to the personal experience of moral commitment for participants. It was the intention to serve and make a difference that was essential to understanding and practicing their commitments. Moral commitment was also embedded in the relational values of caring, treating others fairly and responding to human needs, developing as an extension of or reaction to certain important life experiences.

The saying, "life is lived forwards and only understood looking backwards," seems pertinent to participants' understandings of their experiences of moral commitment and service. Even though they were forcefully drawn or carefully chose to become engaged in service to others, some participants seemed to understand the meaning of that service more fully upon reflection and discussion during the interviews. Therefore, it may appear to the reader that they were somewhat focused upon self. If such is the case, that may be a natural result of my initial question to them (Could you tell me a story about your service to others, a story which conveys what it means to you to be of service to others?). Understandings of their commitments focused on their own lives, their understanding of God and on why they were committed. The exercise of their commitment was relational, however, and

focused on attempting to make a difference in the lives of others. Even the concrete goals or projects they pursued were other-oriented. Signature campaigns for health care reform aimed at high quality of life for others. Planning for a church dance really meant striving to build community. Writing letters to foreign dictators was really aimed at obtaining just treatment and freedom for real people. Making a difference for their fellow human beings was paramount in participants' lives and experiences of moral commitment. Understandings of moral commitment within the context of their own lives, and any psychic rewards they received, were also present; however, those were secondary in importance.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Limitations, Relationship to Previous Research, Research Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the limitations of the study, how my findings relate to previous research on moral commitment, offer suggestions for further research on the topic and present a conclusion. This study attempted to explore, clarify and increase understanding of the complex human experience of moral commitment from a phenomenological perspective. Through in-depth phenomenological interviews with adults deemed by others to be morally committed, data was gathered which will add to the body of literature on the lived experience of moral commitment. The goal of phenomenological research is to reveal individual perceptions and understandings of complex and ordinary lived human experience, and not to validate, disprove, or even create new theory. Although phenomenological findings, such as the structural description of a phenomenon, cannot literally be compared to findings from other methodologies such as experimental design, case study and ethnography, some of this study's findings relate in content to previous research on moral commitment and will be discussed in this chapter.

Other findings from this study serve as a call for further thought and research into the experience of moral commitment. Those findings can be used by researchers to create hypotheses which can serve as foundation for further qualitative research into moral commitment as a distinctive, lived human experience.

Limitations of the Study

I limited the population from which I drew participants to voluntary and human service organizations and non-profit institutions in a large and populous county in a southwestern state. The sample I interviewed was fairly small - - ten participants. Such small samples are appropriate for research conducted using a phenomenological methodology. Since the purpose of the phenomenological approach is to gain rich descriptions of individual experiences or of specific human phenomena, findings from such studies should not be considered generalizable. However, such findings can present deep and meaningful understandings of aspects of the lived human experience as the small sample size allows for in-depth exploration into one phenomenon.

Relationship to Previous Research

This study's finding that moral commitment develops as an extension of earlier life experiences and beliefs corroborates work done by Berkowitz (1987), Colby and Damon (1992), Cortese (1984), Hoehn (1983), Oliner and Oliner (1988), Rest (1986) and others. As in past research, participants in this study chose or were drawn to serve others as an extension of and in direct

relationship to some earlier life experiences. This was true for participants, regardless of type of background, whether abusive, conservative, religious or nurturing. This contrasts, in part, with the Oliner and Oliner (1988) finding that remarkable altruistic behavior grows from values learned from non-punishing parents.

A new finding arising from this study is that the type and focus of selfless service to others were influenced somehow by past experiences (e.g., an abused child was drawn, as an adult, to serve sick and helpless children), thus creating moral commitment as an autobiographical motif, or pattern of life themes. Tarule (1989) described how a person's experiences or relationships can influence their subsequent life circumstances and relationships, reflecting an "autobiographical motif" for that individual. A personal theme or psychological issue is revisited again and again and becomes woven throughout the individual's life, and for some, becomes their life's work.

Tarule used an example from the life of the psychologist Erik Erikson to illustrate an autobiographical motif. Erikson discovered at the age of 14 that he had been adopted by the couple with whom he lived. He subsequently changed his last name to Erikson to signify his adopted state. The new name, Erik Erikson, signified that he was an adopted person who did not know his real name, and was, in effect, his own person. He became Erikson, son of Erik, or son of himself. Erikson then spent his entire life contemplating and writing about the issues of human identity which had become so important to him. In this sense, his life reflected an autobiographical motif. His own psychological issues became his life's work.

✓

The life stories and descriptions of experiences of moral commitment by this study's participants reflect their own autobiographical motifs. Their moral commitments were molded from unhappy childhoods, traumatic life events or periods, personal loss and grief, religious belief, rigorous religious training, poverty and addiction. Their modes and focus of making a difference in the present were clearly influenced by life events and personal themes created years earlier.

Blustein (1991), Palmer (1981) and Walton (1986) postulated that practical reasoning, reflection and deliberative priority were important considerations in the making of commitments. These theories were born out by the evidence in this study of conscious choices to serve others made by some participants. Little can be found in the literature, however, on what some participants described as a compelling drive or force to help others, and on the unsolicited strong feelings and psychic rewards (psychic income) which participants experienced. Kohlberg (1976) contended that reciprocity was a sign of altruism, but focused more on advancement of one's own welfare, and not on unsolicited or unreturned rewards for altruistic behavior.

This study's finding that participants intended to make a difference in others' lives relates in part to research by Andrews (1991). Andrews discussed intention, or the bridge between past, present and future, as a concept essential to the exercise of commitments arising from political beliefs. This study's participants fulfilled their own personal, religious and moral beliefs, hoping to have an impact on others' lives, but often not knowing the final end or impact on others. The process of commitment and the intention to make a

difference seemed more important for them, though, than were the results of that process and intention.

Andrews (1991) found a "synchronicity" between belief and action, and between critical life experiences and the role commitment played in daily life. This study's participants described their moral commitments as a "way of life" and as "the only way to live." Such findings support Andrews and refute Farley's (1986) contention that many philosophers believe that, because individuals change too much in one lifetime to maintain long term commitments, humans are not capable of making and keeping such commitments.

This study provides new data to support Brickman's view (1987) that the nature of commitment is determined by the ambivalence and the bond between the positive (joy) and the negative (sacrifice), and to contradict the Colby and Damon (1992) finding that the morally committed do not experience inner conflict because of their commitments. This study's participants all experienced some degree of internal conflict or struggle between their service to some (which provided them joy and satisfaction) and their obligation to others in their lives (creating frustration about sacrificing one good for another). These dilemmas seemed diminished, however, by their overwhelming belief in the value of their service to others and to God, and by the unsolicited psychic and spiritual rewards they received from serving.

The concept of "psychic income" is a new metaphor which describes the psychic rewards which accrue to the morally committed person. Maslow (1954) described self-actualization, and Colby and Damon (1992) described

unity of self and morality, as experiences or results felt by persons who fulfill their own higher level needs (Maslow) and do that by exercising moral commitment (Colby & Damon). In contrast, study participants explored and described the psychic rewards they received from moral commitment through service to others, regardless of whether or not their own needs were met.

Another finding which expands on previous studies is the relational aspect of partnership with and service to God as a component of moral commitment. Others had described how belief in a meaning greater than self (Oliner & Oliner, 1988), and how possession of unremitting faith (Colby & Damon, 1992) were characteristic of those who were remarkably altruistic or exemplified extraordinary moral commitment. Yet many of this study's participants shared deeper understandings of their roles as God's partner, hands, conduit and instrument. And it was because of and through those relationships with God, that they were able to, and indeed felt obligated to, serve others.

Gilligan (1982) proposed an ideal of moral maturity which both genders could embrace. That ideal encompassed both an ethic of care and responsibility and an ethic of individual rights, achievement and universal justice. Both male and female participants in this study enacted their moral commitments by working for the rights of individuals and groups, and by showing care, compassion and responsibility for individuals and groups. Many participants were deeply disturbed, if not enraged, by the injustices they observed on global, community or personal levels. Such frustration over injustice influenced them to remedy those injustices, sometimes through small

acts of caring and compassion, and at other times through actions which could affect an entire community. Overriding caring and just concern for the lives of individuals often unknown to participants pervaded their service activities. In this sense, care and responsibility for others (other persons or entire societies) met belief in individual human rights, freedom and justice, thus providing an example of Gilligan's ideal of moral maturity.

An interesting extension of Gilligan's ideal of moral maturity was seen in some participants' efforts (evenly divided by gender) to make a difference in others' lives by creating a sense of community among separate individuals through working on goals or needs that may be held in common. Gilligan's studies focused on individual moral development and the exercise of moral beliefs and choices by individuals. Many of this study's participants' beliefs in justice extended beyond how they treated other individuals within their lives, and aimed at fostering human rights and justice and at building community for large numbers of persons, often unknown to them. Participants needed to help others in order to be who they were and were becoming. Self and others were inextricably linked through compassion and concern for justice on a larger scale.

Recommendations to Researchers

After reflecting upon the experiences and understandings of moral commitment in the lives of the participants, I make the following recommendations for further research on moral commitment:

1. Explore the understanding and exercise of moral commitment in

persons who had punishing parents and abusive backgrounds, such as survivors of childhood neglect, abuse and incest. This recommendation arises from the discrepancy between this study's findings on moral commitment in persons who experienced abusive backgrounds and the Oliner and Oliner (1988) finding that remarkable altruistic behavior grows from experiences with non-punishing parents.

2. Explore the experience, nature and meaning of the compelling force or drive which moves some persons to engage in experiences of moral commitment.

3. Explore the inner conflicts and struggles which tend to characterize the experience of moral commitment, and the impact of such conflicts on the lives of morally committed individuals, including the impact on their loved ones. This recommendation arises from the contradiction between this study's findings on the existence of inner conflict in the morally committed and the Colby and Damon finding (1992) that morally committed persons do not experience inner conflict over their commitments. And does the inner conflict experienced by morally committed persons convey lack of integration of self and morality, as suggested by Colby and Damon?

4. Explore the experience, nature and understanding of psychic rewards and their role in creating and sustaining moral commitment.

5. Explore intentionality and its fulfillment as elements essential to the experience and exercise of moral commitment. Is intentionality alone sufficient in the exercise of moral commitment, or does fulfillment of intentions also become necessary, especially as it relates to the concept of "making a

difference" in the lives of persons and communities?

6. Explore the role of moral commitment in the creation and sustaining of community, including the efforts by the morally committed to recruit others to engage in similar service.

7. Explore gender differences and similarities in experiences of moral commitment, especially as they relate to the ethics of care and responsibility and of justice and rights within Gilligan's (1982) concept of moral maturity.

Conclusion

Although the focus of this research study was moral commitment, the study served as the completion of requirements in a doctoral program in Educational Leadership. The doctoral program's core concentration on ethics, moral development, and personal and large scale transformation influenced me to choose moral commitment as a research topic. It is my sincere hope that other researchers, including leadership scholars, can utilize this study's findings in the continuing study of moral commitment and related issues, including moral development and maturity, interpersonal influence, community building, altruism, social activism and personal, organizational and societal change.

For the last two years, the exploration and growing understanding of the phenomenon of moral commitment have occupied a major part of my life. I know it is difficult to understand myself fully. It is an immensely difficult task to comprehend the reasons, desires, passions and actions of others. Through this study I have attempted to enlighten the reader about the nearly indescribable - - the understanding of a small dimension of a complex lived

human experience - - moral commitment.

I found that understandings and expressions of moral commitment encompass the psychological, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and physical realms of human existence. Moral commitment cannot be manufactured for an individual, but arises from and within the context of a life to become a way of life. Moral commitment is spiritual, active, relational, and it always attempts to make a difference. Participants' attempts to make a difference in the lives of persons and communities characterize and define them as morally committed.

We can all learn valuable lessons from their experiences and from their efforts to bring greater understanding to the elusive concept of moral commitment. I am grateful to them for opening their hearts and allowing me in, and for lighting the way as I journeyed with them into their very personal and life-changing experiences. I will never forget them.

REFERENCES

- Andrews, M. (1991). Lifetimes of commitment: Aging, politics, psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ashworth, P. S., Giorgi, A., & De Koning, A.J. J. (Eds.). (1986). Qualitative research in psychology: Proceedings of the international association for qualitative research in social science. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Barnard, H. F. (Ed.). (1985). Outside the magic circle: The autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr. Alabama: University of Alabama Press.
- Bar-Tal, D. (1984). American study of helping behavior: What, why and where? In E. Staub, D. Bar-Tal, J. Karylowski, & J. Reykowski (Eds.). Development and motivation of prosocial behavior: International perspectives on positive morality (pp. 5-28). New York: Plenum Press.
- Bellah, R.N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1991). The good society. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Berg, B.L. (1989). Qualitative research methods for the social sciences. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Berkowitz, B. (1987). Local heroes. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Blustein, J. (1991). Care and commitment: Taking the personal point of view. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bodgan, R., & Taylor, S. J. (1975). Introduction to qualitative research methods: A phenomenological approach to the social sciences. New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Brickman, P. (1987). Commitment, conflict and caring. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Callero, P. L. (1986). Putting the social in prosocial behavior: An interactionist approach to altruism. Humboldt Journal of Social Relations. 13 (1&2), 15-32.
- Coffman, P. (1991, May-June). Inclusive language and perspective transformation. Paper Presented at the Adult Education Research Annual Conference Proceedings. Norman, Oklahoma.
- Cohen, R. (1978). Altruism: Human, cultural, or what? In L. Wispe` (Ed.). Altruism, sympathy and helping: Psychological and sociological principles (pp. 79-98). New York: Academic Press.
- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist

- views it. In R. S. Valle & M. King (Eds.). Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology (pp. 48-71). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Colby, A., & Damon, W. (1992). Some do care: Contemporary lives of moral commitment. New York: The Free Press.
- Cortese, A. J. (1984, August). The sociology of moral judgment: Social and ethnic factors. Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. San Antonio, Texas.
- Donmoyer, R. (1990). Generalizability and the single-case study. In E. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.). Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate (pp. 175-200). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Eisenberg, N. (1986). Altruistic emotion, cognition and behavior. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Eisenberg, N., Reykowski, J., & Staub, E. (Eds.). (1989). Social and moral values: Individual and societal perspectives. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Erikson, E. H. (1982). The life cycle completed: A review. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Etzioni, A. (1993). The spirit of community: Rights, responsibilities and the communitarian agenda. New York: Crown Publishing.
- Farley, M. A. (1986). Personal commitments: Beginning, keeping, changing. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Fay, B. (1987). Critical social science: Liberation and its limits.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Foster, W. (1986). Paradigms and promises: New approaches to educational administration. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Frankfurt, H. B. (1988). The importance of what we care about: Philosophical essays. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gerlach, L. P., & Hine, V. H. (1970). People, power, change: Movements of social transformation. Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Giorgi, A., Fischer, C. T., & E. L. Murray. (Eds.). (1975). Duquesne studies in phenomenological psychology. (Vol. 2). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. (Ed.). (1985). Phenomenology and psychological research. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. (1986). Theoretical justification for the use of descriptions in psychological research. In P. D. Ashworth, A. Giorgi, & A. J. J. De Koning (Eds.). Qualitative research in psychology: Proceedings of the international association for qualitative research in social sciences (pp. 3-22). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Greene, M. (1990). The passion of the possible: Choice, multiplicity

- and commitment. Journal of Moral Education. 19, (2), 67-76.
- Heidegger, M. (1972). On time and being (J. Stambaugh, Trans.).
New York: Harper & Row.
- Heller, W. M., & Mahmoudi, H. (1992). Altruism and extensivity in
the Baha'i religion. In P. M. Oliner, S.P. Oliner, L. Baron, L. A.
Blum, D. L. Krebs, & M. Z. Smolenska (Eds.). Embracing the
other: Philosophical, psychological and historical perspectives
on altruism (pp. 420-432). New York: New York University
Press.
- Hoehn, R. A. (1983). Up from apathy: A study of moral awareness and
social involvement. Nashville: Abington Press.
- Husserl, E. (1969). Ideas: General introduction to pure
phenomenology (W. R. Boyce Gibson, Trans.). London: Allen &
Unwin. (Original work published 1931).
- Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological
analysis of interview data. Human Studies. 8, 279-303.
- Ilsley, P. J. (1991). Investigations into the human phenomenon of
commitment. Paper presented at the Adult Education Research
Annual Conference Proceedings. Norman, Oklahoma. (May-
June).
- Jordan, J. V. (1984). Empathy and self boundaries. Stone Center for
Developmental Services and Studies, no. 16. Wellesley, MA.
- Jordan, J. V. (1987). Clarity in connection: empathic knowing, desire
and sexuality. Stone Center for Developmental Services and

Studies, no. 29. Wellesley, MA.

- Kahana, E. (1984, August). Beyond dependency, autonomy and exchange: prosocial behavior in late life adaptation. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association. Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Kant, I. (1959). Foundations of the metaphysics of morals (L. W. Beck, Trans.). Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Kohlberg, L. (1971). From ought to is. In T. Mischel (Ed.). Cognitive Development and epistemology (pp. 151-235). New York: Academic Press.
- Kohlberg, L. (1976). Moral stages and moralization: The cognitive-developmental approach. In T. Lickona (Ed.). Moral development and behavior (pp. 31-53). New York: Holt.
- Kohn, A. (1990). The brighter side of human nature: Altruism and empathy in everyday life. New York: Basic Books.
- Kotarba, J. A. (1980). Discovering amorphous social experience: The case of chronic pain. In W. B. Shaffir, R. A. Stebbins, & A. Turowetz (Eds.). Fieldwork experience: Qualitative approaches to social research pp. 57-67). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Krebs, D. L. (1992). Introduction. In P. M. Oliner, S. P. Oliner, L. Baron, L. S. Blum, D. L. Krebs, & M. Z. Smolenska (Eds.). Embracing the other: Philosophical, psychological and historical perspectives on altruism (pp. 69-72). New York: New

York University Press.

- Krebs, D. L., & Smolenska, M. Z. (1992). Introduction. In P. M. Oliner, S. P. Oliner, L. S. Blum, D. L. Krebs, & M. Z. Smolenska (Eds.). Embracing the other: Philosophical, psychological and historical perspectives on altruism (pp. 133-141). New York: New York University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Locke, D. (1983). Moral reasons and moral action. In H. Weinreich-Haste & D. Locke (Eds.). Morality in the making: Thought, action and the social context pp. 111-124). Chichester, England: Wiley & Sons.
- Lofland, J. (1971). Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Lyons, N. (1983). Two perspectives on self, relationships and morality. Harvard Educational Review, 53, 125-145.
- MacIntyre, A. (1984). After virtue: A study in moral theory. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Maslow, A. (1954). Motivation and personality. New York: Harper & Row.
- Maslow, A. (1962). Toward a psychology of being. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.
- Merleau-Ponty, M (1962). Phenomenology of perception. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Mezirow, J. & Associates. (1990). Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Midlarsky, E. (1984). Competence and helping: Notes toward a model. In E. Staub, D. Bar-Tal, J. Karylowski, & J. Reykowski (Eds.). Development and maintenance of prosocial behavior: International perspectives on positive morality (pp. 291-308). New York: Plenum Press.
- Mischel, T. (Ed.). (1971). Cognitive development and epistemology. New York: Academic Press.
- Noddings, N. (1984). Caring: A feminist approach to ethics and moral education. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Oliner, S. P., & Oliner, P. M. (1988). The altruistic personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe. New York: The Free Press.
- Palmer, P. (1981). The company of strangers: Christians and the renewal of America's public life. New York: Crossroads.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Piaget, J. (1932). The moral judgment of the child. London: Routledge.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle, & S. Hallings (Eds.). Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human

- experience (pp. 41-60). New York: Plenum Press.
- Puka, B. (1983). Altruism and moral development. In D. L. Bridgeman (Ed.). The nature of prosocial development: Interdisciplinary theories and strategies. New York: Academic Press.
- Rachels, J. (1986). The elements of moral philosophy. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971). A theory of justice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rest, J. R. (1986). Moral development: Advances in research and theory. New York: Praeger.
- Rushton, J. P. (1980). Altruism, socialization, and society. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Schutz, A. (1967). The phenomenology of the social world. (G. Walsh & F. Lehnert, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Scott, J. F. (1971). Internalization of norms: A sociological theory of moral commitment. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Seidman, I. E. (1971). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences. New York: Teacher's College Press.
- Skinner, B. F. (1978). The ethics of helping people. In L. Wispe` (Ed.). Altruism, sympathy and helping: Psychological and sociological principles (pp. 249-262). New York: Academic Press.
- Staub, E., Bar-Tal, D., Karylowski, J., & Reykowski, J. (Eds.). (1984).

Development and motivation of prosocial behavior:

International perspectives on positive morality. New York: Plenum Press.

- Stephens, W. N. (1985, March-April). Case studies of altruistic persons: AERA roundtable. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association. Chicago, IL.
- Straughan, R. (1983). From moral judgment to moral action. In H. Weinreich-Haste, & D. Locke (Eds.). Morality in the making: Thought, action, and the social context (pp. 125-140). Chichester, England: Wiley & Sons.
- Sullivan, W. M. (1986). Reconstructing public philosophy. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Svensson, L. (1986). Three approaches to descriptive research. In P. D. Ashworth, Giorgi, A., & A. J. J. De Koning. (Eds.). Qualitative research in psychology: Proceedings of the international association for qualitative research in social science (pp. 23-46). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Tarule, J. M. (1989). Unpublished material presented in a lecture. Cambridge, MA.
- Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1986). Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings. New York: Wiley & Sons.

- Tesch, R. (1984, April). Phenomenological studies: A critical analysis of their nature and procedures. Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting. New Orleans, LA.
- Tesch, R. (1990). Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools. New York: The Falmer Press.
- Valle, R. S., King, M., & Halling, S. (1989). An introduction to existential-phenomenological thought in psychology. In R. S. Valle, & S. Halling (Eds.). Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience (pp. 3-16). New York: Plenum Press.
- Van Hesteren, F. (1992). The self in moral agency: Toward a theoretical model of the ideal altruistic personality. In P. M. Oliner, S. P. Oliner, L. Baron, L. S. Blum, D. L. Krebs, & M. Z. Smolenska (Eds.). Embracing the other: Philosophical, psychological and historical perspectives on altruism (pp. 170-193). New York: New York University Press.
- Von Eckartsberg, R. (1986). Life-world experience: Existential-phenomenological research approaches in psychology. Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America.
- Walton, D. N. (1986). Courage: A philosophical investigation. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Warmington, E. H., & Rouse, P. G. (Eds.). (1956). Great Dialogues of Plato (W. H. D. Rouse, Trans.). New York: New American

Library.

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language. (1989).

New York: Portland House.

Weinreich-Haste, H. (1983). Social and moral cognition. In H.

Weinreich-Haste, & D. Locke. (Eds.). Morality in the making:

Thought, action and the social context (pp. 87-110).

Chichester, England: Wiley & Sons.

Worchel, S. (1984). The darker side of helping: The social dynamics

of helping and cooperation. In E. Staub, D. Bar-Tal, J.

Karylowski, & J. Reykowski. (Eds.). Development and

motivation of prosocial behavior: International perspectives on

positive morality (pp.379-396). New York: Plenum Press.

APPENDIX

University of San Diego**CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT**

I understand that I have been selected to participate in a research study on moral commitment conducted by Suzanne MacRenato. I also understand that I will meet twice with Ms. MacRenato. I further understand that interviews conducted with me by Ms. MacRenato will be audiotaped and transcribed, and that the written transcriptions will be sent to me for verification and correction shortly after the interviews.

The interviews will last approximately one hour each and will occur over the course of a two to three week period. Participation in the study should not involve any added risks or discomfort to me except for possible minor fatigue generated by sitting for the interviews.

My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without jeopardy of any kind.

I understand that records of my interviews and any notes taken by Ms. MacRenato during the interviews will be kept completely confidential. My identity will not be disclosed without consent required by law. I further understand that to preserve my anonymity, neither my name, nor any identifying information, will be used in any publication of the results of this study.

Suzanne MacRenato has explained this study to me and answered my questions. If I have other questions or research-related problems, I can reach Ms. MacRenato at (619) 453-3272.

There are no other agreements, written or verbal, related to this study beyond that expressed on this consent form. I have received a copy of this consent document. I, the undersigned, understand the above explanations and, on that basis, I give consent to my voluntary participation in this research study.

Signature of Subject

Date

Location

Signature of Witness

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date