

LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE OLD / OLD: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF SIX SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA RESIDENTS AGE 85 YEARS AND OLDER by *Geoffrey William Shaskan, 2009*

What do we actually know and understand about the lived experience of people 85 years and older? What, for example, are the effects of loss and ageism on the elderly? The field of gerontology is currently moving away from its formerly negative view of this population toward a more positive sense of the “old/old.” This more positive perspective, called gerotranscendence by many, emphasizes resilience over fragility and decline, and was borne out by my qualitative field research of six interviewees.

Three important conclusions regarding the old/old emerged from this research. First, profound, socio-cultural events, especially those experienced in early life, are intertwined with the personal trajectory of one’s life. Second, the subjects showed an amazing resilience that permeated their recollections of life in the past as well as their thoughts about life in the present and future. Third, this resilience allowed subjects to accommodate themselves to the large number of losses experienced by those who outlive nearly all their friends and family members. In short, this dissertation provided encouraging evidence of the possibilities of resilience and effective adaptation in an intensively interviewed group of old/old, diverse in terms of race, gender, socio-economic status, and life style.