The autobiographical reflections of the famous cellist Pablo Casals are full of exuberance for life and its meaning. Yet they also describe several prolonged periods when Casals despaired so greatly at the apparent meaninglessness of life and suffering that he had become "obsessed with the idea of suicide" (Kahn, 1970, p. 50). He recalls, for example, that "day and night I brooded on these conditions. I walked the streets of Barcelona feeling sick and full of apprehension. I was in a pit of darkness, at odds with the world. I dreaded the dawning of the day, and at night I sought escape in sleep. I could not understand why there was such evil in the world... or what indeed was the purpose of life under such circumstances—or of my own existence" (p. 50). Clearly Casals had experienced a life-transforming transition from this despair at life's meaninglessness to an exuberance of meaning which then characterized most of his life. Yet he says he understood little of how the transition came about.

The purpose of this study is to discover and describe the experience of transitions such as that of Pablo Casals: transitions from despair at life's meaninglessness to strong meaning and purpose in life.

THEORIES OF TRANSITION TO MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND EXISTENTIAL APPROACHES

Many of the psychological theories and therapies related to meaning and purpose in life derive from Husserl's (for example, 1913/1931) application of phenomenological method to the problem of describing the nature of human existence.

Extending Schutz's (1966) application of Husserl's ideas, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that all types of meanings are socially constructed and are internalized through childhood socialization. If such
meanings are seriously challenged by contradictory experience, secondary socialization, or the plurality of meaning subuniverses within modern society, these authors direct the individual to seek and commit the self to an alternate construction of reality. Though unique ideas may be generated in the process, Berger and Luckmann emphasize that this also occurs in the context of a community which holds similar views.

Heidegger (1927/1962) argues that the creation of meaning is integral to the human orientation toward the future, and satisfying meaning is created by structuring existence around fulfilling realistic and uniquely individual future goal possibilities. To do this Heidegger suggests that individuals must first acknowledge and experience the suppressed dread of finiteness which previously led them to live automatically and inauthentically according to the forms, routes, and opinions of the masses. Then they must accept the limitation of finiteness and any other uniquely personal limitations, but go on to choose to take responsibility for living toward unique personal possibilities which precede death. This would involve interrogating options, selecting personally appropriate ones, and committing the self to live according to the goals they imply. Heidegger proposes that this sort of living would be experienced as satisfyingly meaningful, because it would be authentic, or true, both to the individual self and the unpleasant givens of existence.

Most existentialists concur that meanings are human constructions but, like Heidegger, emphasize authenticity and individuality more than the social creation of meanings. Heidegger stresses the need for integrating the reality that there is nothing after death. In contrast the clinician Bugental (1965) and philosopher Blocker (1974) stress that individuals can only experience life as meaningful when they integrate the reality that there is no God to create objective meaning and guide life choices. Such individuals are then free to live according to meanings they individually create or choose. In a more general application of Heidegger’s emphasis on authenticity, Boss (1963) and Binswanger (1973) encourage despairing individuals to let go the defenses that have narrowed their experience and surrender to whatever manifests itself in life.

Frankl’s logotherapy (1963, 1967, 1973, 1975) appears to reflect presuppositions of his religious culture (Morgan, 1983). In contrast to other thinkers, he argues that the role of human thought is not to create but to discover true meanings that objectively exist independently of and prior to the thinking of individuals or societies.

Frankl concurs with Heidegger’s emphasis on goals. His term “noodynamic” denotes both the individual’s subjective yearning for meaning and the pull of the demand quality of meanings which exist both outside