

Psycho-Spiritual Needs of Older Adults

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Senescence

- In Erikson's original schematization, the last era in the human life course
- Term used earlier to designate the entire last half of human life
- Process of growing old
- Roots of the word linked to senile and senility
- Thus a turn to the word, "maturity"

“On Aging” by Maya Angelou

When you see me sitting quietly,
Like a sack left on the shelf,
Don't think I need your chattering.
I'm listening to myself.
Hold! Stop! Don't pity me!
Hold! Stop your sympathy!
Understanding if you got it,
Otherwise I'll do without it!
When my bones are stiff and aching,
And my feet won't climb the stair,
I will only ask one favor:
Don't bring me no rocking chair.
When you see me walking, stumbling,
Don't study and get it wrong.
'Cause tired don't mean lazy
And every goodbye ain't gone.
I'm the same person I was back then,
A little less hair, a little less chin,
A lot less lungs and much less wind.
But ain't I lucky I can still breathe in.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Consider challenges, like ageism, loss, and sense of finite time as well as opportunities for continued growth during this life phase fostered by resiliency, flexibility, and adaptability
- Central issue—How older people maintain a sense of continuity and meaning that helps them cope with change and multiple losses, sometimes including physical limitations, bereavement overload and other vulnerabilities
- Aloneness is a paramount issue, and many people experience a sense of isolation

Principle Developmental Task

- Achievement of ego integrity (being whole or undivided) versus despair
- Self actualization
- Reconciliation

Bereavement

- “Mourning and Melancholia” —Psychic Detachment
- Kubler-Ross--DABDA
- Cyclical vs Linear Models of Grief
- Impact of Milestones and Transitions
- Relational, Narrative, Dual Process Models of Grief, and Meaning Reconstruction Theory

Initial Responses

- Numbness, disbelief, sense of moving on **auto pilot**
- Veiling of the mind which enables bereaved to get through rituals of burial and early period of mourning
- Stress expressed in tension, anxiety, and awareness that nothing is the same; sense of being afloat—of losing direction, disorientation
- Many experience difficulty finding comfort

A New Reality

- Sometimes called RECOIL refers to the time when the numbing lifts as if a spring snapped
- It's possible for the new reality to come into the full consciousness of the bereaved
- Each person finds his or her own way of visiting and absorbing the fullness of the loss
- Could be a time when older adults feel most depressed
- Dramatic confrontation—like setting an extra place at the table

A New Reality cont.

- **Loss oriented behaviors** help mourners face their grief and the sense of loss that follows a death **Restorative behaviors** includes keeping ties to the deceased alive while attending to life changes As the bereaved cope, they alternate between these two modalities
- Thus grief is a **dynamic** process
- May feel totally inadequate and are sure that they are going crazy
- Bereaved may feel totally alone as others have gone on with their lives
- Often older adults themselves are unaware that the process may have only begun

Accommodation

- Over time, mourners make accommodations to the death
- Experience sense of their own abilities to prevail, to deal with the pain, and to find new ways of living in the world
- We begin to see change associated with growth
- Identity shift is consolidated at this time; a new self evolves
- Older adults find voices they did not have before

Accommodation cont.

- Detours become part of what is now normal for people
- Most mourners seem to reach a point where grief no longer runs them; they run it
- Pain no longer driving force in their lives
- Faith and religion often provide meaning and comfort that may elude mourners earlier

Losing a Spouse

- The death of a partner may cut across the very meaning of the other's existence
- Everyday occurrences underscore the absence of your mate and cause pain
- Spouse's death requires an adjustment from being a couple to being single
- Consider whether younger or older couple and closeness of bond

Losing a Spouse cont.

- In the first year after the death of a mate, higher rates of illness and death among widows/widowers ← diminished self care and loneliness
- Consider gender differences—resilience of older women vs. widowers who believe they must be self reliant
- Relief after caring for an ailing spouse
- Importance of availability of stable support network and contact with bereaved peers who can serve as role models

Losing a Parent

- One of the hardest things they have ever dealt with in their lives—sadness over the loss, relief at ending of parent's suffering, anxiety because buffer against death is gone, and memories, painful and comforting
- Loss of moral support, nurturance
- Can change outlook on life and values
- Religious beliefs can provide important ways of thinking about and coping with parental death

Losing an Adult Child

- Seems unnatural—a death “out of sequence”
- Perpetual bereavement particularly with death of an only child
- Possible loss of a caregiver for older adults
- “Competing” for role of “most bereaved”
- Sometimes older adults become caregivers for grandchildren
- Few social support resources

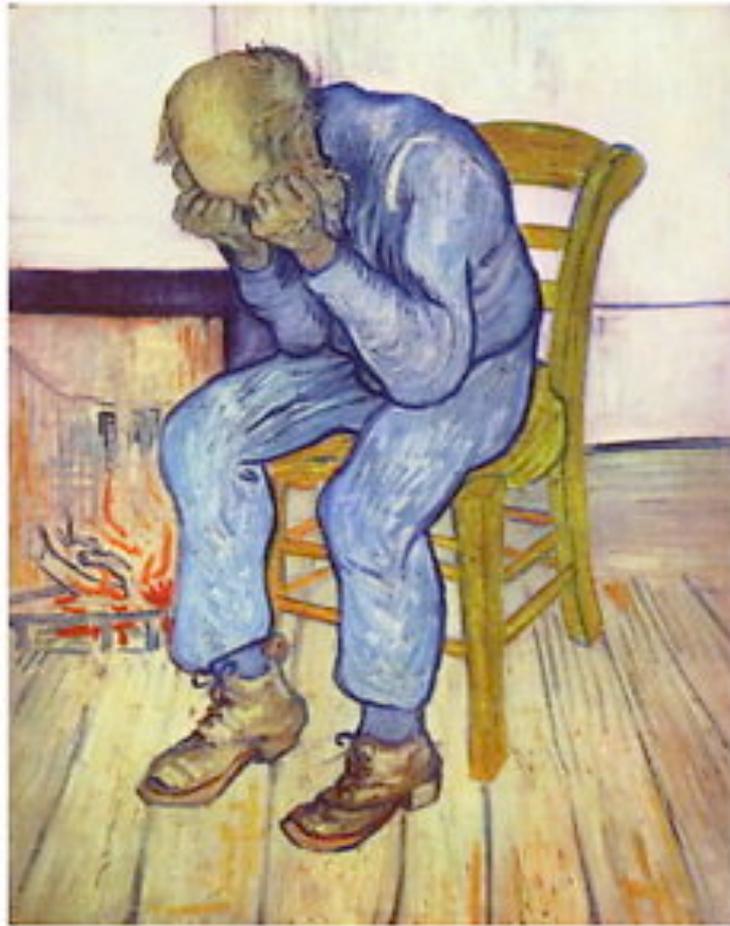
Grief vs Depression

- Sadness and other common manifestations of grief do resemble some of the symptoms associated with depression
- Grief is a healthy reaction to loss whereas depression is a complicated condition
- Both may involve an experience of being pressed down and a withdrawal from the world
- Clinical depression is a complicated form of grieving characterized by angry impulses toward the ambivalently loved person, impulses that are turned inward toward the self
- Normal grief reactions do not include the loss of self esteem commonly found in most clinical depression
- Freud believed that in grief, the world looks poor and empty while in depression, the person feels poor and empty

Serenity

- Ability to sense that there is good and bad within myself (and others) and that they can touch and make contact and the bad doesn't destroy the good
- Compassion for the self precedes compassion for the other
- Accept my own goodness and badness in an integrated way and accept those in the outside world too
- Capacity to mourn, reflect, and tolerate ambivalence present in every relationship

Vincent Van Gogh



Risk Factors for Suicide in Late Adulthood

- Social Isolation and Loneliness
- Boredom, Depression, a Sense of Uselessness
- Loss of Purpose and Meaning in Life
- Financial Hardship
- Multiple Losses of Loved Ones
- Chronic Illness, Pain, Incapacitation
- Alcohol Abuse and Drug Dependence
- Desire to Avoid being a “Burden” or to End One’s Life with Dignity

Public Meaning of Aging

- How can “private suffering” become a meaningful and significant part of life?
- What moral virtues should properly be associated with preparing for and living old age?
- What are the characteristic moral and social obligations of older adults? Is old age a time for devoting one’s life to pleasure and well-being, or is it a time for active involvement in the civic life of society?
- What medical and social entitlements are due to older adults? How can we arrive at an equitable level of support?

Needs of Older Adults coping with Life Threatening Illness or Dying

- Maintaining a sense of self, self concept and self esteem
- Participating in decisions regarding their lives
- Being reassured that their lives have value
- Receiving appropriate and adequate health care services

Some Reasons Given For Accepting Death

- Death is preferable to inactivity
- Death is preferable to the loss of the ability to be useful
- Death is preferable to becoming a burden
- Death is preferable to loss of mental faculties
- Death is preferable to living with progressively deteriorating physical health and concomitant physical discomfort

Robert Butler

“After one has lived a life of meaning, death may lose much of its terror. For what we fear most is not really death but a meaningless and absurd life. I believe most human beings can accept the basic fairness of each generation’s taking its turn on the face of the planet if they are not cheated out of the full measure of their turn.”

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