

Valerie Lander McCarthy, PhD, RN  
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## A New View of Successful Aging: The Role of Adaptation and Transcendence in Fostering a Holistic View of Successful Aging

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## What is Successful Aging?

- absence of disease and disability
  - independent physical and cognitive function
  - active and productive engagement in life
- (Rowe & Kahn, 1987)



“Identify the factors that put one octogenarian on cross-country skis and another in a wheelchair.”

(Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 38)

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## Limitations

- Focus on disease, not health  
(Fadem & Minkler, 2002)
- Success - an outcome, or a process?  
(von Faber, et al., 2001)
- No consensus on what is 'success'  
(Phelan, et al., 2004)
- Misses elders' criteria for success  
(Bowling & Biffle, 2006; Strawbridge, et al., 2002)
- Behavioral determinants of health  
(Schulz and Northridge, 2004)
- Does not consider racial, cultural, or SES disadvantages  
(Holstein and Minkler, 2003)

## New Theory

- Holistic view of health even in the presence of chronic disease
- Developmental process changing across the lifespan
- Merge biomedical and psychosocial viewpoints
- Include spiritual or existential criteria
- Add social and environmental determinants
- Extend the potential for successful aging to vulnerable populations

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## Holistic View of Successful Aging

- "An individual's perceived favorable outcome in adapting to the cumulative physiologic and functional changes associated with the passage of time, while experiencing spiritual connectedness and a sense of meaning or purpose in life." (Flood, 2005, p. 35)
- Predicted by adaptation and transcendence

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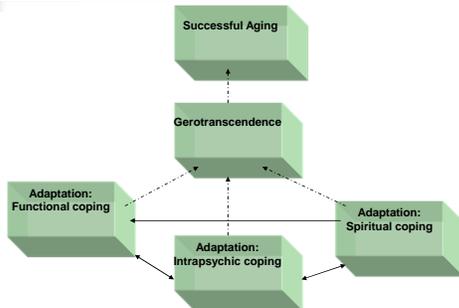
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## Mid-range Nursing Theory of Successful Aging (Flood, 2005)



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## Three cross-sectional studies

- **Pilot study (N= 20)**
  - Cross-sectional survey design
  - Convenience sample
  - Moderate-income CCRC
- **Initial study (N= 123)**
  - Cross-sectional survey design
  - Random sample
  - Low-income CCRC
- **Follow-up study (N= 152)**
  - Cross-sectional survey design
  - Convenience sample
  - Upper-income CCRC (n= 52), Moderate-income (n= 51) and Low-income (n= 49) Community-dwelling at Senior Centers

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## Main Research Questions

1. To what degree do adaptation and transcendence predict successful aging, controlling for age, income, health and function?
2. What are the relative contributions of each predictor?

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## Conceptual Definitions

### Adaptation

- Adaptation was defined for the study as proactive coping, i.e., positive, future-oriented coping strategies used to adjust to the challenges and opportunities of aging
- People cope proactively not only in response to stressors but also by building up financial or social resources in anticipation of future stressors

(Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002)

### Transcendence

- Self-transcendence is a developmental potential involving a shift to a broader perspective on life, expanding the way older adults perceive themselves, their relationships with others and dimensions greater than the self
- Both psychological factors (relating to others and self) and spiritual factors (having a sense of meaning, acceptance, and living fully in the present) are reflected in self-transcendence

(Reed, 2009)

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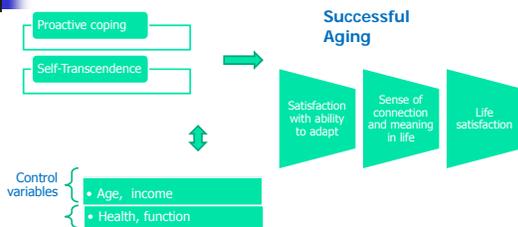
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## Model of Study Variables



Source: McCarthy, 2011. Adapted from Flood, 2005

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## Results

All three studies found statistically significant models regressing successful aging on proactive coping and self-transcendence, controlling for age, income, health & function

- Results study #1 Adj. R2= .365,  $p < .000$
- Results study #2 Adj. R2= .454,  $p < .000$
- Results study #3 Adj. R2= .494,  $p < .001$
- All three studies found effect sizes were significantly greater for self-transcendence than for proactive coping.
  - Results study #1 STS  $\beta = .502 > PCI = .285$
  - Results study #2 STS  $\beta = .523 > PCI \beta = .199$
  - Results study #3 STS  $\beta = .459 > PCI \beta = .232$

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## Conclusions

- The findings of these studies indicate Flood's mid-range nursing Theory of Successful Aging merits further investigation (2005)
- Findings also suggest transcendence – a factor in the spiritual or existential domain identified by older adults as important to successful aging – and may be an important new contributor which has been missing from successful aging research to date (Crowther, 2002; Sadler & Biggs, 2007)

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