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A Literature Review of the Psychosocial Development of Older Adults

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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to examine existing models of psychosocial development of older adults especially framed around human mortality as a point of discussion that informs all aspects of human development in older adulthood. Well known, in addition to burgeoning, human psychosocial development models that considered older adulthood were chosen for their inclusion of the topic of death amid the ageing experience. Two overarching perspectives of death in relation to human development resulted. One was the *thanatos* perspective, which generally viewed death as a purposeful component of human development, while the *transcendental* perspective saw death as something to be conquered or transcended through development. The phenomenon of death possesses an undeniable association with ageing and the course of psychosocial development during the life span, especially in older adulthood. Death is a critical element in the discourse of human development and ageing. Emerging theoretical frameworks of psychosocial development, especially gerontological models, must admit to the primacy of human mortality in understanding human growth, decline, and transitions. (Contains 2 tables)

This literature review will endeavor to present applicable theories concerning the human development of *older* adults. Hauge (1998) specified the two main classifications

of delineating human ageing to be biological theories and psychosocial theories. The models covered in this literature review will pertain to those outlining adult personality or psychosocial development into older adulthood. Hoyer and Roodin (2003) proffer that “personality refers to a person’s distinctive pattern of behavior, thought, and emotion” (p. 378). The precise interest of this literature review is to spotlight concepts of human development that assist in elucidating patterns of development, cognition, and affections of older adults. Moreover, the presented set of older adult developmental models will be analyzed for its relevance to human mortality, which will be held as a running theme throughout this literature review. A rationale for this manner of conjoint processing will ensue.

Background and Purpose of Literature Review

The study of older adult development only came into being, in a systematic manner, during the past three to four decades (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004). It is curious as to why a focus of study on older adults only recently arrived in such force considering that people have been existing into old age for centuries. Erikson once remarked that “lacking a culturally viable ideal of old age, our civilization does not really harbor a concept of the whole of life” (1997, p. 114). Little wonder as to the still enervated state of understanding older adult development relative to the sheer amount of knowledge accumulated regarding childhood development, as the aged sector of human society has long been a minority until recent times (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004). Projected for a formidable increase in the population of older adults in the United States the aged are posing to be an irrefutable social presence. Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick recognized this even back in 1986 as they claimed:

Today we are faced with an unprecedented growth in the number of so-called elderlies in a technological world in which their overall role remains quite unclear. There is apparently little historical continuity preserved by their voices and their presence. The fabric of society, the center, 'does not hold' the aged. (p. 14)

According to the U.S. Bureau of Census (2001), in 1900 only four percent of the population was of age 65 and over. In 2000, approximately 13 percent of the population was age 65 and over. By 2030 it is proposed that 20 percent or more of the population will be aged 65 or older. Furthermore, one of the fastest growing segment of the population in this country is the 85 years and older (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Not only are these senior adults growing in number, they are also living longer in better health than ever before. Older adults are becoming a striking force in the community requiring a deliberate and planned approach in better comprehending the characteristics of their strengths, deficiencies, propensities, and other idiosyncrasies. It stands to reason that the dearth of definitive models of older adulthood reflecting their lived reality be based upon the simple fact that the sheer number of the aged in modern history has not reached the critical mass until now. Only when enough people begin to live into the deeper recesses of the human life span will there be more accurate resources (lives) to investigate, all motivated by a sense of real human need for perspicuity instead of mere speculations, albeit educated.

Among the argot in the study of overall human development taxonomic differences are suggested in the following manner: *young old* - capturing those aged 65-75, *old old* - capturing those aged 75-85, and *oldest old* - capturing those aged 85-death

(Bee, 1998). These constructed gerontological cohorts refer to the notion that traditional adult developmental models are insufficient to rightly illuminate the course of ontogeny in the deeper recesses of the aging continuum. Furthermore, this distinction attempts to clarify that people over the age of 65 or conventional retirement age are not a homogenous group merely characterized by global decline or an incessant pursuit at sustaining a sense of youthfulness, but that qualitative maturation can and do occur in actuality (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986; Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004; Tornstam, 2005).

Among the intrapersonal, relational, social, and existential issues in older adulthood is situated, in a special way, the fact of human mortality. In sheer chronological placement, older adults are in proximal range to death more so than all other beings within humanity. This situation may be obvious to state but in publications within ageing studies (gerontology) a substantial gap remains. Coleman and O'Hanlon (2004) report that "surprisingly few gerontologists have taken up this point....much gerontological writing, though, has almost given the impression that death is an avoidable rather than inevitable conclusion to old age" (p. 22). This literature review proposes that it is a significant problem when an apodictic human event, such as death, is so glaringly neglected in discussions around older adulthood and development therein.

However, developmental theories of older adulthood do exist with attempts to consider the important topic of death. Hence, the purpose of this literature review is twofold: 1) to analyze existing human developmental models to better understand the psychosocial development of older adults, and 2) to present these models framed around the fact of human mortality as a point of discussion that informs all aspects of human

development in older adulthood.

Conceptual Framework of Literature Review

As mentioned, this literature review aims to frame a particular understanding of older adult development that will prime a perspective spotlighting the saliency of a mentation steadily reflecting upon the things of human existence culminating in contemplative preparatory reasoning of the inexorable event inherent in our mortal experience - death. Death is proposed here as a constant theme in all of adult development. Bee (2004) states that “all of adult life is a process of moving toward death” (p. 384). Even from conception a human being is on the journey of losses. Marking this initiation of losses in the human experience Weenolsen (1988) defended birth to be the “first experience of loss – from uterine (homeostatic) equilibrium, relative changelessness, a kind of death to which Freud (1920, reprinted 1955) once believed we had an instinct to return. Birth is also the first time we ‘leave home’” (p. 268). Much of the well known human developmental models pronounce the presence of either ‘crises’ to resolve at each point in the life span (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1982, 1986) or ‘tasks’ to undertake during particular phases in human existence (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). It is proposed here that human mortality, videlicet death, is a priority theme weaving throughout the entirety of human development, especially during old age.

Exclusively considering older adults acts to hammer the existential point made by Bishop J. C. Ryle of Liverpool when he observed that “in the midst of life we are in death” (1878, p. 353). Such a truism is indubitably pertinent to human beings encroaching upon the frontiers of older adulthood - the landscape of earthly existence that

only a minority have been able to view, until modernity. Aiken (1994) remarked “whatever the critical age may be there comes a time in the life of an individual when he or she is apt to measure life in terms of the number of years left rather than the years already spent” (p. 264). It is undeniable that older adulthood is the province, amid the throes of time, that, intuitively speaking, is most ripe for frequent or sustained cogitations of mortality and impending death. It is as Hannelore Wass (1978), founding editor of the journal *Death Studies*, once announced, via the title of her book chapter, that dying is the final stage of *growth* for the human being.

So, how do notions of human psychosocial development in older adulthood relate to human death? The answer may be one of *meaningfulness*. Vincent (2003) admits that “fantasies of immortality are bad for older people” (p. 162). He affirms:

To deprive death of meaning and value is to undermine the meaning and value of old age. Attempts to deny, or hide, death will have deleterious effects on old age. If death is to be hidden and avoided, then so will old age. If death is to be denied by the construction of immortality, then old age will be denied. (p. 161)

It is an existential burden indeed to attempt to grow as a being knowing that the culminating event is designed to be one of physical nonbeing.

Again, Vincent (2003) provides insight on death’s connection to developmental issues as he states that the “progression from birth to death gives life meaning; without death there are no stages, no different phases of life” (p. 161). If death did not exist in the human experience the concept of human development will be utterly obscure. The perennial query would ring - “Humans to develop unto what?” Human development would be an endless chore, a nagging task when no natural end exists in sight. In some

strange teleological way death helps humans to develop by setting borders and limits to unbridled hubris and schizophrenic presumptions. In the absence of death there is a lesser meaningful development. In the context of such development resides an irresolute and joyless work of 'becoming'.

Review of the Literature

To fittingly describe human development is no small nor docile task. This sentiment also applies to older adult development. With the myriad of variables that comprise a person's existence it is mind-boggling to ponder upon the entirety of connections, significant and casual, that an older adult has knowingly and unknowingly established across the span of a lifetime. Consider how the numerous genetic, physiological, psychological, sociological, axiological, historical, and dispositional branches of a single human being become inexorably intertwined, even infused among each other. An eventual attempt at theorizing the manner of cogitation and behavior of such a complexus can emit no other than a general, broad sketch from which to hopefully see some semblance of logic, along with avenues with which to personally identify.

With such a consideration in mind the following sections of theoretical overviews will consider select theories of human development, which include the period of older adulthood, that have been influential in recent history.

A Chronological Overview of Older Adult Development

Prior to delving into more specific annotations of particular theories of older adult development, especially as it regards to death, here is provided an overall historical sketch of psychosocial developmental models that emerged in time. This overview purports to present a flow of themes of how various people were apt to see the

phenomenon of human ageing in the midst of their own facticity.

The first major psychosocial theory of ageing is considered to be the Disengagement Theory, which is usually attributed to the work of Cumming and Henry (1961). This theory was calibrated from a large-scale cross-sectional study of various age groups in Kansas City. This psychosocial model postulated older adults to have a penchant towards gradually withdrawing from their social roles, hence becoming less and less involved with activities in the world, while society, acting as context, reciprocates by depending less and less on older adults as active social participants and contributors.

The historicity of the late 1950s, wherein Cumming and Henry engaged in theorizing about older adult development, promulgated that getting old automatically meant illness and unhealthiness. The two aforementioned researchers were reacting to such a perspective that reduced human ageing to a pathologic process. Thus they endeavored, via the disengagement theory, to normalize older adults detachment from active social participation; to have externally visible social withdrawal by the aged mated to a 'usual' and 'natural' way of being at that stage in life. In other words, Cumming and Henry sought to explain (and defend) the healthiness of the gerontological pattern of the aged to recede from society instead of stigmatizing such disengagement as a disorder. As such, the disengagement theory of older adult development originally aimed at combating the popular implicit conception of ageing at that historical time (particularly in the United States), which was one of negativity.

Then, in 1972, Lemon, Bengtson, and Peterson formulated the Activity Theory of ageing in direct opposition to 'normalized' ideas of disengagement. Activity theory of older adult development contended that disengagement with one's social roles was not

decided upon willingly by older citizens (such as Cumming and Henry suggested) but mediated by social forces and pressures. Studies promoted by activity theory further revealed that many older adults who expressed 'happiness' were those remaining in active social roles. Sustaining some level of activity has been a consistent enough of a phenomenon in older adulthood that some gerontologists have hailed it as 'the busy ethic' (Ekerdt, 1986). Therefore, Achenbaum and Bengtson (1994) reported that the manifest revulsion by other researchers against the notion of 'disengagement as normal' was such that adhering to theories of disengagement for older adults was considered offensive to the field of gerontology.

Circa the time of the assertion of the activity theory, Robert C. Atchley (1972) proposed his thought regarding a Continuity Theory of ageing. This theory posited that as an individual enters older adulthood the processes of adaptation in both internal (psychological) structures as well as externalized (social/relational) patterns were exercised quite similarly to the habits actuated during their middle adulthood. What differentiates continuity theory from activity theory is that the former inheres a lifestyle of activity *beyond* a mere carbon copy of earlier stages of adulthood. This theory assumes a lifelong learning stance for older adults, especially as it champions the spiritual development of the aged. Atchley (1999) proposes that spiritual development can be the focus of many older adults because it is an aspect of their being still able to be worked and activated while their psychobiological constituents may be deteriorating. This sentiment of the continuity theory of ageing reflects an Eriksonian point of integration during the last stage of life, which also encompasses the construct of wisdom. Essentially, this process of integration and wisdom appear to pertain to deeper

mannerisms of meaning-making through the activation of reminiscence.

Similar to the qualitatively different activities of older adults described by the continuity theory, David Gutmann (1987) posited that older adulthood is a time of transition from one type of involvement to another. Having studied diverse cultural entities, Gutmann aspired to evince that withdrawal from particular social roles is not the end state of a transition. But rather that “it is only the first step in a total process of transition and re-engagement, a process that is interrupted or aborted in a secular society” (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004, p. 39). Gutmann illustrated his point of *disengagement and re-engagement* via how in certain traditional cultures the aged men become the wise elders of that social system leaving behind the more pragmatic affairs of daily life to their juniors. It is worthy to remark how disengagement depicted in Gutmann’s view of ageing is not to merely apathetically detach from worldly affairs but instead to “unloose possibilities for greater self-realisation [*sic*] which is also to the benefit of society as a whole” (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004, p. 39).

In summary, this section presented a brief survey of some of the key theoretical models in recent history explaining the psychosocial development of older adults. From notions of disengagement to activity to continuity to transition and re-engagement - these concepts evidently arose from the contextual influences of those theorists’ times, colluding with the personal philosophies of the investigators.

In the proceeding sections a selection of additional theories will be reviewed in more detail. These theoretical models were chosen for their holistic approach to human growth and their inclusion of death in discussing late adulthood.

Thanatos

Thanatos is used here to allude to the psychoanalytic foundations of the theorists mentioned in this section. To be more precise, the thoughts of Carl Jung and Erik Erikson can be categorized under the rubric of psychodynamic or depth psychology (Patterson & Watkins, 1996), which are heavily Freudian. According to Sigmund Freud, human instinct throughout life may be grouped into two basic distinctions: *Eros* and *Thanatos* (1933). For clarity sake, *instinct* is the energy source in behavior that “constitute the dynamics of personality” (Patterson & Watkins, 1996, p. 14). *Eros* expresses the life instinct that seeks to preserve one’s existence. *Thanatos* describes the human drive back towards non-existence, a destructive instinct. Interestingly, Freud once remarked that the “goal of all life is death” (1920, p. 38). He viewed the dualistic tension between the two instincts not only in individual human development but also in the evolutionary aspects of broader society and civilization. Thus, threaded throughout an organism’s development (ontogeny), according to psychoanalytic principles, the depth of the struggle between life-drive and death-drive determines the status at each moment.

Jung and the Second Half of Life

Among the key figures that partook an integral role in theorizing on overall human development Carl G. Jung (1875-1961) is frequently mentioned in gerontological writing. Unlike Freud, Jung gave more attention to psychoanalytic issues of ageing and these thoughts are commonly referred to what Jung called the ‘second half of life’ (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004). Much of his theory is based on clinical data (as he was a trained psychiatrist) and analysis of “ethnography, mythology and symbolic creations from many cultures and historical periods” (Levinson, 1978, p. 4). Jung declared that in old age a person should become more concerned about the interiority of being. A goal of

emphasizing one's interiority is to achieve a deeper state of individuation - "the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole' (Jung, 1939/1968, p. 275)" (Patterson & Watkins, 1996, p. 40). Jung advocated for older persons to withdraw from mundane social roles to do the work of introspection for sake of attaining a deeper self-realization (this aspect may be reflected in the disengagement model of ageing). He defended the notion that older adulthood was meaningful in its own right, as a separate period of life, instead of having to find its worth and significance via a continuation of earlier stages of youth (this aspect poses an anti-continuity stance). Additionally, in old age, Jung suggested a qualitatively different approach to life. More wisdom-oriented dispositions were encouraged, along with a conscious exercising of a broader perspective regarding existence versus the pragmatic tendencies of younger periods.

Amid Jung's theoretical perspectives of human development and ageing, death was recognized as a special thrust toward meaning. Indeed, he asserted that the special work in older adulthood is to prepare for death. Coleman and O'Hanlon (2004) report that, according to Jung, "it is necessary for an ageing person to discover death as a goal towards which he or she is striving" (p. 16). They add that the very danger of denying the reality of one's eventual death "robs the second half of life of its purpose" (p. 16).

In summary, Jung's impact on gerontological thought champions a deliberate living during the span of older adulthood. The Jungian tasks for older adulthood are becoming more wise and mature through conscientious introspection and individuation, all towards preparing for death. As will be noticed in subsequent sections Jungian perspectives to human ageing have re-emerged in the ideas of other developmental

theorists.

Erikson and the Epigenetic Model

Erik Erikson is popularly known for the construction of his psychosocial developmental model comprised of eight stages wherein each stage inheres a crisis to be worked through (1963, 1968, 1982, 1986). He ascribed his theory to be ‘epigenetic’, which was “a term paediatricians [*sic*] of that time coined to describe the genetic plan, the step-by-step growth of the foetus [*sic*]” (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004, p. 19). A critical factor in Erikson’s model is of his attention to social context; how people develop, not in a vacuum, but amid an environment populated by other people with their own personal developmental issues (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004). He posited a dialectical relationship between individual and society such that these two entities both change each other and, in turn, become altered by each other. Thus, Erikson believed that all human beings journey through these universal stages or periods of time towards change and development pressured by culture-specific dynamics.

Towards enumerating the adulthood portion of the eight stages the following is provided:

- Sixth stage (Young adulthood): crisis of intimacy against isolation, with potential of resulting in the positive strength of *love*, which Erikson defined as “mutuality of devotion forever subduing the antagonisms inherent in divided function” (1986, p. 37)
- Seventh stage (Middle Adulthood): crisis of generativity against stagnation, with potential of resulting in the positive strength of *care*, which Erikson defined as attending to the “needs of all that has been generated” (1986, p. 37)

- Eighth stage (Old age): crisis of integrity against despair, with potential of resulting in the positive strength of *wisdom*, which Erikson defined as “detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself” (p. 1986, p. 37).

Regarding the contents and achievements during the eighth stage, Jane Loevinger (1976) also theorized, and so reinforced, that an adult person continually develops with the aim of reaching a state where the internal (beliefs, thoughts) and external representations (visible, detectable deportment) converge evermore closely thereby portraying an integrated ego (self).

As can be noted, Erikson prescribed binary developmental tasks for each stage between what he called the ‘syntonic’ versus ‘dystonic’ dispositions (1986). Clearly, Erikson emphasized the import of these pivotal crises as Colman and O’Hanlon (2004) observe that “from the start Erikson stresses the necessity for experiencing both positive and negative emotional states as a prerequisite for personal growth” (p. 20). In the vernacular, it is akin to the saying: No pain, no gain. For Erikson, each stage in his hierarchical model contains a pre-established thematic instance of pain or contention. This situation requires work towards some effect where the consequence may be either growth or regression. The gain can only emerge from recognizing, affirming, and engaging the crises.

As a central focus in Erikson’s final stage of development he advocated for the acceptance of death. He scribed that one of the tasks of the elder “includes coming to accept the inevitability of death’s enforced ‘leave-taking’” (1986, p. 63). There is no sentiment of avoidance or inattention, by this Freudian theorist, for what is so real and impregnable in life. Moreover, Erikson commented that “as the elderly face the

increasing imminence of death and the specter of serious disability...they confront our ultimate inability to conquer or master this final inevitability” (p. 148).

In summary, Erikson’s epigenetic model made, and continues to make, significant contributions to developmental thought related to gerontological periods in the human experience.

Levinson and the Seasons of Adult Development

Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) studied developmental issues of 40 men aged 35-45 utilizing a biographical interviewing methodology to better understand development in adulthood. Akin to Erikson’s perspective of human development where societal influences become part of the equation, Levinson et al. (1978) posited that to devise a “deeper and more complex view of adulthood, one has to consider both nature of the person and the nature of society” (p. 5). This notion is illustrated in this model’s concept of *life structure*. Life structure is defined as “the basic pattern or design of a person’s life at a given time,” which provides a “way of looking at the engagement of the individual in society” (1978, p. 41-42). According to Levinson et al., most important aspects of life structures are choices humans make concerning marriage, family, and occupation (work and relationships). This concept of life structure was so central to the theory that it became the primary focus of the research analysis. Pointedly, Levinson et al. remarked that adult development itself is equivalent to the “evolution of the life structure during the adult years” (1978, p. 42).

Coleman and O’Hanlon (2004) declare that Levinson’s phasic model (versus hierarchical, which insinuates a growth unto more superior, higher levels of development) “constitute probably the most delineated theoretical description of the main

can live without bitterness or despair during late adulthood. Finding meaning and value in his life, however imperfect, he can come to terms with death. (p. 37)

Thus, this *seasons* theory of human development stipulates that the work of growth in late adulthood is precisely to prepare for death via making peace in the inner being as well as in other relations towards finding conciliatory coherence when looking over one's lived life.

In summary, Levinson et al. offered rich conceptualizations for further thought concerning adult development, though they confessed to speculating on issues of late late adulthood. Nevertheless, these investigators boldly stated that their prescribed pattern of eras and transition periods “exist in all societies, throughout the human species” (1978, p. 322). While acknowledging the varied styles individuals may live within underlying life structures, Levinson et al. still claimed a certain universality to the format of life structures according to their constructed model.

Transcending Loss and Death

Tornstam and Gerotranscendence

A most recently proposed theory of older adult development that “presupposes a qualitative shift in the development of later life” (Coleman & O’Hanlon, 2004, p. 39-40) is the concept of Gerotranscendence by Lars Tornstam (1994, 1996, 1997, 2005).

Tornstam (1997a) summarily stated that “gerotranscendence is a shift in meta-perspective, from a materialistic and pragmatic view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one” (p. 17). This theory is much akin to a Jungian style of mystical perspectives to life for late adulthood, Eriksonian regarding ego-integrity in final stages of development, reminiscent of the disengagement theory in many respects, and allusive

to Gutmann's (1987) disengagement and re-engagement explanation of ageing behavior.

Towards an informed perspective of Tornstam's proclivity towards the tenets of gerotranscendence the citation below is provided:

The perpetual mismatch between theory and certain empirical data is one of the things that has led us to believe that we sometimes erroneously project midlife values, activity patterns, and expectations onto old age, and then define these values, patterns, and expectations as successful aging. Maybe our projections are not only rooted in midlife, but also in Western culture and White middle-class hopes for "success" to continue into old age. (2005, p. 3)

Clearly, Tornstam indicts various investigators of allowing their midlife biases to overly color the theories they publish. Thus, Tornstam aims to construct an alternative view of ageing by acutely listening to "what old people themselves say about this, rather than relying on the statements of young and middle-aged desk theoreticians" (2005, p. 3).

Gerotranscendence is based on the analysis of intensive interviews with 50 mature Swedish individuals from 52 to 97 years of age. There are three basic psychosocial arenas that comprise gerotranscendental perspective: Dimensions of cosmic, self, and social and personal relations. The cosmic dimension includes qualitatively variant views by older adults on certain constructs such as time and space, of how a sense of one's past and present gradually seem less distinct, along with greater intimateness with earlier generations of people. The self dimension is characterized by older adults becoming more selfless, altruistic, engaging in more deliberate existential reflection for sake of ego-integrity. The dimension of social and personal relationships depicts a narrowing down of social connections (hinting at patterns of disengagement) towards an increased

selectivity in choosing and maintaining interpersonal connections only when personal meaningfulness is beheld.

Death is codified under the cosmic dimension in gerotranscendence. Tornstam (2005) asserts that older adults, in their ongoing development, faces death with decreasing fear. He posits that a result of minimized fear of death is a redefining of both life and the extinction of life. Furthermore, the ambiguities of earthly existence and the tensions among ideologies are more accepted with less angst. In general, a broader consideration of human life appears to be the norm in late adulthood, according to Tornstam's theory.

In summary, Tornstam is explicit in his desire to 'purify' frameworks of human ageing and development by paying just attention to the aged than succumb to the commentaries asserted by midlife-minded theoreticians. The main thrust of gerotranscendence is to delineate the anatomy of maturity achievable in older adulthood, along with its inclusiveness of both activity and disengagement orientations (which are defined in qualitatively different ways) as it professes to "offer a new both/and framework" (2005, p. 195) of development during old age.

Weenolsen and the Loss/Transcendence (L/T) Paradigm of Development

Patricia Weenolsen, a life span developmental psychologist, produced a text in 1988 wherein she delineated her research finding after analyzing "life histories of 48 women aged 25-67" (p. xii). Her interest was reposed in developing "a new life span developmental paradigm" (p. xiii), based on constructs of loss and transcendence, that may be applicable to humans, both male and female. Weenolsen explained her underlying motives for pursuing such a study:

As a life span developmental psychologist, I had noted how few, limited, and incomplete our life span theories were (i.e., Erikson, 1950; Vaillant, 1977; Levinson, 1978; Freud, 1953, reprinted 1985; Piaget, 1952, 1974); further, there was little mention of the humanistic-existential issues of meaning, loss, and death - the issues that I perceive as central to human development. (1988, p. 1)

Weenolsen's focus on the existential and psychological constructs of loss and transcendence is referred to as the L/T paradigm. She described how the women in her study concocted their life narratives with the salient contours of either loss-orientation or transcendence-orientation. Those who seemed to have a more firm self/life-meaning structure had adopted a transcendence-orientation for life losses. Weenolsen's qualitative study emphasizes the creation of meaning over the span of humans' development highlighting the pivotal role of life losses and transcendence thereof.

Within the L/T paradigm of life span psychosocial development Weenolsen provided definitions of loss and transcendence. Loss is "anything that destroys some aspect of an individual's life and/or self", while transcendence is the "overcoming of loss and the re-creation of self and/or life" (1988, p. 3). Furthermore, a general formulation of the loss and transcendence process is provided wherein Weenolsen turns to death studies for theoretical assistance. This loss and transcendence process includes four phases or steps: grieving, searching, replacement, and integration (Eriksonian in nature).

Transcendence in the L/T paradigm is a continuous re-narration of the self. Development of the human being is the product of this re-defining work of the self due to and through the series of existential events that are losses and the focused contemplation thereof. By such definitions human death would be the ultimate loss as the self and life are destroyed.

Death being a core ingredient of human development, according to this paradigm, Weenolsen mused that “all the other leavetakings of one’s life have been prototypes of the final one, and how one has transcended the others may be of help now” (p. 304). Indeed, the L/T paradigm proposes death to be “at once the ultimate loss and the ultimate transcendence” (p. 468). And as such, Weenolsen theorized that this is why human beings are so ambivalent towards death. Moreover, she echoed the tradition of Freud and his assertion regarding instincts that vie in human existence when she stated that “both avoidance and embrace of death form the root motivations for much of our existence” (p. 500). She continued to establish that mortality is a foundational fact of humans *being* and *becoming*, which is another manner of describing *development*. Death is showcased in the L/T paradigm, and rightly so, as no other loss on earth transcends the loss that is death.

In older adulthood (Weenolsen also categorized it as senescence) one’s task is to continue to transcend multiple losses that are resident in this period of existence. Weenolsen (1988) listed some of the typical losses of old age including retirement (though Tornstam (2005) would disagree with this life event as a loss necessarily), structuring of time, altered self-concept, change in social worth, physical deterioration, increasingly insular set of social contacts/friends, and a proliferation of the deaths of associations. Constructing personal meaning from the raw material of loss means to transcend, which leads to the psychosocial development of the aged. Thus, the key contribution of Weenolsen’s L/T paradigm is that it recognizes the veritable gravity of the innumerable losses that compose human life and the attempt by mortals to transcend these grievances. It is viewed that in the acts of transcending the psychosocial

development of the human, older adult is fashioned, all amid an existential context of constant meaningful tension.

Discussion and Synthesis

The psychosocial developmental perspectives reviewed thus far all had either overt or assumed pertinence to the inescapable existential construct of death amid the context of old age. In this section, a synthesis will be endeavored toward a more systematic view of the aforementioned theories in relation to their consideration of human mortality.

The two overarching categories, under which the various developmental models were subsumed, were *thanatos* (psychoanalytic in orientation) and *transcendental* (humanistic-existential in orientation). The manner in which thanatos theories considered human development and death was the following:

- Human development has an end, which is death (Freud, Jung, Erikson, Levinson)
- Older adults must consciously prepare for their personal death (disengagement, Jung, Erikson, Levinson)
- The very *purpose* of the second half of life is to prepare for death (Jung)
- Gradual transitioning in restrictive ways (relinquishing) is normative in old age (Erikson, disengagement, Levinson, Gutmann)
- Death is meaningful as it provides a set boundary for human development (Jung, Erikson)
- Denying impending death is not wise nor developmentally appropriate (Jung, Erikson, Levinson)
- Sensing an integration of one's life as a whole is a prime developmental task in old

age, especially in light of approaching death (Jung, Erikson, Levinson, Loevinger)

- An integrated self (achieved ego-integrity) is imperative to have a ‘good’ death (Erikson, Levinson)
- Human beings develop throughout the life span and *within* the life-death continuum; always respecting the delimiting factor posed by death (Jung, Erikson, Levinson)

The manner in which transcendental theories considered human development and death was the following:

- Death, amid development in old age, is acknowledged (Tornstam, Weenolsen)
- Death (as loss) is something to be transcended (Tornstam, Weenolsen)
- Death as loss and freeing at the same time (Weenolsen)
- A developmental task in old age is to loose the fear of death (Tornstam)
- A developmental task in old age is to redefine death (and life) (Tornstam, Weenolsen)
- Human beings develop throughout the life span and, in some way, *transcend* mortality (Tornstam, Weenolsen)

Models of Psychosocial	Development In Old Age
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Thanatos</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(theme: Death as (meaningful) delimitter)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Transcendental</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(theme: Death as transcendent)</p>

Jung (Individuation)	Tornstam (Gerotranscendence)
Erikson (Epigenetic Model)	Weenolsen (L/T paradigm)
Levinson (<i>Seasons of Development</i>)	
Disengagement Theory	[Activity Theory (busy ethic)]
Disengagement/Re-engagement Perspective	[Continuity Theory]

The above calibration is with purpose to differentiate among the developmental models reviewed in this literature review. Of course the attentive reader will perceive that not all of the theories mentioned earlier were recognized among the differentiation, as well as how some developmental frameworks accommodate both sides of the division. For example, activity and continuity models were bracketed but placed under transcendental orientation due to activity theory's suggestiveness to cling to past youthfulness, which presumes decline and death as events to be either postponed or hurdled over, and continuity theory's propulsion towards maintaining "midlife lifestyle and identity into old age" (Tornstam, 2005, p. 9), which possibly reflect an agenda that views old age and death as a negative identity. This attempt at a systematic separation of theories was not to draw absolute demarcations but instead with intent to further present how a single existential construct (death) may be variably considered in old age.

Weenolsen exclaimed that "stagnation is an illusion" (1988, p. 59). Theorists like Erikson would affirm such an exclamation as he too saw the crises and tensions of developmental life tasks to engender either positive, nurturant growth or unconstructive, arresting regression. Along the developmental plane of human existence, neutrality and immotility cannot characterize the reality of mortal men and women. Whether one inclines to adopt disengagement or activity or continuity in old age there is movement of

some sort.

It is important to remember that no one theory of older adult development can possibly capture all the nuances of old age and the psychosocial intricacies involved. The theoretical frameworks reviewed above have been criticized on various fronts ranging from accusations on its ideality (such as Erikson's *epigenetic* model and Levinson's *universal* postulation of life structures) to being inconsiderately exclusive (such as Tornstam's gerotranscendental tenets that require the aged adult to be able to exercise a high level of cogitation and meditation). But, all in all, these are whole theories that aimed to assist an improved, a more fair understanding of older adults in society.

Conclusion

This literature review of selective theories of older adult psychosocial development aimed to assay particular notions of ageing. There have been both subtle and overt proposals throughout this literature review of death's undeniable association with ageing and older adulthood. Furthermore, a synthesis of the differing developmental perspectives was attempted towards a more systematic view of the relationship between growth and change in older adulthood and death.

In closing, Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick (1986) are consulted for a summative statement regarding developmental work in old age:

With aging, there are inevitably constant losses - losses of those very close, and friends near and far. Those who have been rich in intimacy also have the most to lose. Recollection is one form of adaptation, but the effort skillfully to form new relationships is adaptive and more rewarding. Old age is necessarily a time of relinquishing - of giving up old friends, old roles, earlier work that was once

meaningful, and even possessions that belong to a previous stage of life and are now an impediment to the resiliency and freedom that seem to be requisite for adapting to the unknown challenges that determine the final stage of life. (p. 332)

Here is captured the notions of aging, loss, reflection in older adulthood, adaptation, disengagement, re-narration, transcendency, and acceptance. It is quite a list of things to accomplish, at any age. And so, there is apparently much development to acquire in old age as time passes toward death. May the developing elder discover at the end, and there is an end, a hopeful state of being having found the journey worth the privilege.

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