Discussion of Definitions of Successful Aging

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Overview

I. Introduction

II. Part 1: Pre-20th Century Approaches on Successful Aging

III. Part 2: Early Modern Approaches on Successful Aging

IV. Part 3: Challenges and Opportunities

V. Conclusion
Do We Need Alternative Definitions of Successful Aging?

“At your age, good health is pretty much a thing of the past. My advice is, find an illness you enjoy.”
Part 1. Pre-20th Century Approaches on Successful Aging

- **Hindu model of lifespan** ("The retired person" and "The Ascetic")
  - Similar to Erikson’s stage of integrity
  - Similar to Tornstam’s theory of Gerotranscendence
  - Precursor to other notions of life stage

- **Hebrews:**
  - Old Testament on King David’s death
  - “The wisdom of our fathers”

- **Greek Philosophers:**
  - Plato on Aging
  - “The spiritual eyesight improves as the physical eyesight declines.”
Part 1. Pre-20th Century Approaches on Successful Aging (continued)

• **Medieval and later views on successful aging**
  – *Shakespeare's* monologue in “As you like it”
  – *French proverb* (16th and 19th century)
    “Si jeuness savait si vieilless pouvait”
    “If youth only knew better, if elderly were only able to do”
  – *Johann Wolfgang Goethe*
    from “Trunken müssen wir alle sein (1825)”
    “Youth is drunkeness without wine: if old age can drink itself back to youth, that is a wonderful virtue”
  – Other Pithy sayings regarding aging (both pre-20th and 20th century)
    *Will Durant* “The individuals succumbs but he does not die if he has left something to mankind.”
Part 2. Early Modern Approaches on Successful Aging

• Multidimensional views of successful aging
  – Jung’s “Second half of life” implies “Disengagement” (1920)
  – Erickson’s Life Stages and “Ego Integrity” (1950s)
  – Disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961)
  – Havighurst, Neugarten, & Tobin (1961)
  – Reichard, Livson, & Peterson (1960)
  – Robert Peck’s Ego Integrity and Ego Transcendence (1968)
    (precursor to Tornstam’s theory of Gerotranscendence)
Commonalities on Successful Aging

Pre-Modern View
Philosophy & Religion

“Psychodynamic” View
Erikson (also developmental)
Baltes’ SOC model (?)

Successful/Optimal Aging

Developmental View
Havinghurst & Neugarten
Rowe & Kahn (1996)
Reported Proportion of Successful Aging by Study

(Depp, & Jeste, 2009)

*Figures from “Definitions and Predictors of Successful Aging”, Depp, & Jeste (2009)
Part 3. Challenges and Opportunities

- **Successful dying** as a missing component of successful aging
- Where does **disability** fit in?
- Do definitions of aging keep up with **social change, technology, & globalization**?
- Potential **cohort differences** in definition of successful aging (suggested by Tirth Bhatta)
• Thank you for your attention!