Lend Me Your Ear And I’ll Sing You A Song: A Musical Exploration of Aging

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Soundscaping Source
Our Plan:

- Explore aging by exploring songs by aging artists
- Lens: Tornstam’s theory of gerotranscendence
- Tool: Practical ideas for sharing music intentionally
Old Theories of Aging

- Disengagement theory – intrinsic tendency to withdraw from society, even as society rejects older people
- Continuity theory – we bring into old age the entrenched habits, preferences and values we’ve always had
Gerotranscendence

- Proposed by Tornstam beginning in the 1980s
- Shift from rational, self-centered thinking to transcendent thinking
- Increased life satisfaction in a developmental pattern including “a redefinition of the self and relations to other people as well as a new way of understanding existential questions.” (Tornstam, 2011)
- Three dimensions:
  - Cosmic level – broad existential changes
  - The self – view of the present self and self in retrospect
  - Social and personal relations
Gerotranscendence

- Cosmic level
  - Time and childhood – the past and present seem very close together
  - May be reconciliation while reviewing events from childhood
  - Feeling connected to previous and future generations
  - Becoming more comfortable with death
  - Acceptance of the mysteries of life
  - Rejoicing everything from grand events to small experiences
Gerotranscendence

- The Self
  - Self-confrontation – discovering good and bad aspects of the self (discovering the shadow self - Jung)
  - Decrease in self-centeredness
  - Body-transcendence – caring for the body without being obsessed
  - Self-transcendence – egoism replaced by altruism
  - Ego integrity – all the puzzle pieces fitting together
Gerotranscendence

- Social and Personal Relationships
  - Decreasing interest in superficial relationships
  - Seeing a difference between self and role
  - Emancipated innocence – getting away with acting like a kid
  - Modern asceticism – getting rid of “stuff”
  - Transcendent everyday wisdom – moving beyond the right-wrong duality
Gerotranscendence increases with age and seems to be associated with increased life satisfaction (Tornstam, 2011).

Crisis experiences can lead to higher scores on cosmic transcendence for younger respondents (up to age 55) (Tornstam, 2011)

About 20% of the population reaches high levels of gerotranscendence automatically
What prevents or blocks gerotranscendence?

- Expectations that aging should involve a continuation of the same values, interests, and activities as in midlife
- What if depression and anxiety were not a result of loneliness or aging, but of hindered development?
Gerotranscendence

- Criticisms of gerotranscendence (Jewell, 2014)
  - Too similar to Erikson's eighth stage and disengagement theory
  - Is it really age-related?
  - What about culture and personality type?
Using Music Intentionally

- Weave songs and stories together
- Choose music with intention (e.g. for movement)
- Look for personally significant music
- Don’t be afraid of unfamiliar music
- Recognize when someone wants or needs to go deeper musically, and refer to a music therapist
Musical Life Review Model (Sato, 2011)

- Stimuli – music, art, pictures, literature
- Theme – major life events, family, hobbies, work, community, life roles, relationships, heritage
- Response – happy memories, contentment, nostalgia, regret, anxiety, despair
- Evaluation – verbal processing, creative expression
- Therapeutic outcomes – integration, sustained hope, emotional intimacy with family, working through emotions, awareness of what to do with time left


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