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PREVIEW

INTRINSIC RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION,
ADVERSE LIFE EVENTS, COPING PRACTICES, AND
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-TRANSCENDENCE IN OLDER WOMEN

by

Georgina A. Draur

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Community
and Human Resources

Under the Supervision of Professor James A. Thorson

Lincoln, Nebraska

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Intrinsic Religious Motivation, Adverse Life Events, Coping Practices,

and the Development of Self-Transcendence in Older Women

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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

INTRINSIC RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION,
ADVERSE LIFE EVENTS, COPING PRACTICES, AND
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-TRANSCENDENCE IN OLDER WOMEN

Georgina A. Draur, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1997

Advisor: James A. Thorson

The objective of the present research study was to expand and refine the definition of self-transcendence, create an instrument that measures the phenomenon, and examine the relationships among age, intrinsic religious motivation, adverse life events, coping practices and the development of self-transcendence in a group of older women. Self-transcendence was measured using Draur's (1995) Self-Transcendence Scale; intrinsic religious motivation was measured by Hoge's (1972) Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale, and coping practices were measured by Folkman and Lazarus's (1988) Ways of Coping Questionnaire. Adverse life events were measured by the Stokes/Gordon Stress Scale (Stokes & Gordon, 1988). The nature and extent of the above relationships were described through triangulation (Merriam, 1988), using correlational research methods to analyze the quantitative data, and axial coding methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1991) to organize, integrate, and analyze the qualitative data.

The results of this study indicated that there was a strong positive correlation between self-transcendence and intrinsic religious motivation ($r = .26, p < .01$). There also was a strong positive correlation between self-transcendence and the coping practice designated as positive reappraisal ($r = .39, p < .01$) using the raw score method, which was upheld using the relative score method ($r = .39, p < .01$). There also was a negative correlation between self-transcendence and the coping practice designated as accepting responsibility ($r = -.26, p < .05$), as well as a strong negative correlation between self-transcendence and the coping practice designated as escape-avoidance ($r = .33, p < .01$) using the relative score method. Also found was a negative correlation between self-transcendence and current stress ($r = -.25, p < .05$). Other correlations were found among the self-transcendence factors and the coping practice factors.

In essence, this study found that although a person does not have to be elderly to achieve self-transcendence, self-transcendence is more likely to be found in the older population, especially among women who have an abundance of intrinsic religious motivation who have dealt with stress using positive reappraisal and who have low levels of current stress.

DEDICATED TO

MY HUSBAND,
DR. RONALD A. DRAUR,

MY CHILDREN,
RON, TOM, DANIEL, AND CHERISH,

AND TO MY PARENTS,
WHO HAVE TRANSCENDED THIS LIFE,
RENE AND PHYLLIS ANDERSON

"They tell me my pattern was cut out before I was born and now I've got to run my fingers along a sharp-sheared, pin-prickly world to find my edges, but it's not so, for I am my own tailor and I'm cutting myself out now."

--Quote from an unknown source written
in the journal of an older woman.

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Throughout my doctoral program I have frequently composed in my mind the acknowledgement section of my dissertation. I always thought that when it was time to write it, the words would come easily. However, this was not the case. Words expressing such great appreciation do not come from the mind, but from the heart, and so it is from my heart that the following acknowledgments come.

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* * *

PREFACE

The case studies presented in Chapter IV of this study were meant to illustrate the presence or lack of self-transcendence in a sample of older women. The comments that were made were very personal. Special attempts have been made to preserve confidentiality in this study.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

The Problem

Over the past four decades, several investigators have attempted to identity the last developmental task of adulthood, but none have provided an explicit explanation of what that task entails (Erikson, 1968; McClusky, 1976; Peck, 1968). The final developmental task is important because its completion indicates not only the successful resolution of the tasks and issues associated with all preceding stages of development, but it also marks the end of psychosocial development itself. Some investigators have suggested that this task is self-transcendence (Maslow, 1971; McClusky, 1976; Peck, 1955; Reed, 1987), but the concept of self-transcendence has been confounded by problems of vague definition.

Among the many definitions for self-transcendence, Reed's (1988, 1991a) comes the closest to describing the concept used in the present study, yet it remains imprecise. Reed (1988) stated that self-transcendence referred to the "capacity of an individual to expand personal boundaries and become oriented to perspectives, activities, and purposes beyond the self without negating the importance of the self." Although this definition has been very useful in the mental health arena (Coward,

1990; Reed, 1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1991a), it does not entirely describe the phenomenon often recounted by older adults.

To illustrate, in an exploratory study of self-transcendence (Draur, 1992), a 77 year-old woman related a recent extraordinary experience where the purpose of life was revealed to her. In describing this phenomenon, she said it was "like a curtain being lifted, or a veil being parted" exposing for a brief moment "the purpose of life" with all its hidden truths and secret meanings. In that moment, the answers to her life-long questions were answered. She realized for the first time that each trial she had faced in her life had meaning, and the growth associated with each had contributed to the individual she had become.

Although this woman had reflected upon the reasons behind her trials at the time they were occurring, the mundane daily responsibilities of raising children and tending to the general business of life prohibited her from dwelling on them. She recalled that she was always searching for truth, but it was not until old age, when she had time to read, ponder, and meditate that the purpose of life was illuminated. Having experienced this, she felt at peace, and her quest for meaning was satisfied. She felt as if she had become a new person, possessing a keen understanding of the grand design and

how her life had fit into it. She was now content to live out the rest of her days trying daily to improve herself and to serve others as best she could. She had reached a new state of existence defined in the present study as self-transcendence.

Reed's (1988) definition of self-transcendence is expanded in the present study by conceptualizing it not only as the process of rising above, triumphing over, and finding meaning in the significant life events faced across the lifespan, but also as the arrival at a new, higher state of existence wherein the purpose of life is more clearly understood (Draur, 1992). This new state of existence represents a victory over the ego or self. Although this definition likely will change as new research unfolds, for now it serves as the operational definition for the present study.

Background

Two qualitative studies provide the foundation for the present study. The first (Draur, 1991), which focused on what it was like for women to grow old in America, resulted in two main, but opposing concepts: (a) self-centeredness and (b) self-transcendence. Those in the first study who seemed to fare the best were those who lived their lives in accordance with the concept of self-transcendence.

In an attempt to affirm the observations about self-transcendence made in the first study, an intensive investigation of the concept was undertaken in a second study (Draur, 1992). The results revealed several basic themes: (a) having peace and contentment, (b) coming to realize that people are the most important aspects of life, (c) getting prepared to die, (d) gaining wisdom, (e) accepting old age, and (f) knowing the purpose of life. Moreover, the second study suggested that intrinsic religiosity (the depth of religious belief), adverse life events (the most distressing events in a person's life), and coping practices (the processes a person uses to contend with stressful events) were all important elements in the development of self-transcendence.

One of the objectives of the present study was to expand and refine the definition of self-transcendence and to create an instrument to measure it. Another objective was to determine if there were significant relationships among the variables of intrinsic religious motivation, adverse life events, coping practices, and self-transcendence, as was suggested by the second qualitative study.

Although some aspects of each of these variables have been studied, research correlating them has not been done to any great extent. If the task of older adults is

to develop self-transcendence as the culminating stage of life, it is reasonable then to ask if intrinsic religious motivation, the stress associated with adverse life events, and coping practices relate to the phenomenon. The present study attempts to answer these and related questions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to expand the definition of self-transcendence, create an instrument to measure the construct of self-transcendence according to the new definition and the results of the qualitative studies mentioned above, and explore the effects intrinsic religious motivation and adverse life events have on the development of self-transcendence in a group of older women. Self-transcendence was measured using Draur's (1995) Self-Transcendence Scale; intrinsic religious motivation was measured by Hoge's (1972) Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale; coping practices were measured by Folkman and Lazarus's (1988) Ways of Coping Questionnaire, and adverse life events were measured by the Stokes/Gordon Stress Scale (Stokes & Gordon, 1988) which focuses on current stress. The nature and extent of these relationships were described using multiple methods or triangulation (Merriam, 1991); correlational research methods were used to analyze the

quantitative data, and axial coding methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1991) were used to organize, integrate, and analyze the qualitative data.

Rationale

The rationale for carrying out the present study was based on the assumption that self-transcendence might be one of the final tasks in life, and that its development is dependent, at least in part, upon intrinsic religious motivation and how individuals cope with adverse life events.

Rationale for Studying Women

Although there are many noteworthy reasons to study older women exclusively, three points were the basis for doing so in the present study. First, up until very recently, women have been conspicuously overlooked in human development research (Weenolsen, 1988), resulting in research findings being applied to women when the population studied has been mostly male. Gilligan (1979) stated that theorists such as Freud, Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg "fashion women out of a masculine cloth" (p. 432), which is dangerous because it can lead to false assumptions about women. Second, since women generally live longer than men, there are more of them available for study at the final stage of adulthood. Third, coherent information providing the basis for

policy-making in the public and private sectors might result in knowledge about the particular needs of women in the last stage of adulthood.

Theoretical Model

The theoretical model used for the present study is based on one of Reiss’s (1976) recommendations for diagramming theoretical propositions. This proposition deals with relationships between independent and dependent variables, and was incorporated into the theoretical model for self-transcendence development as seen in **Figure 1.1**.

Figure 1.1. Theoretical Model for Self-Transcendence Development

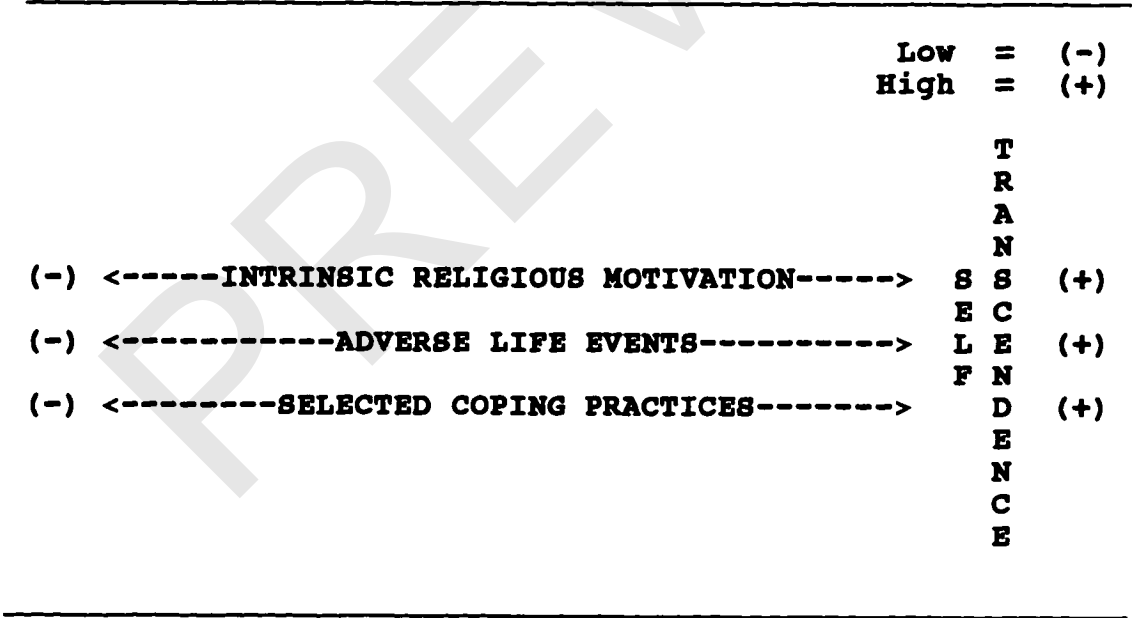


Figure 1.1. The model above shows how the variables of intrinsic religious motivation, adverse life events, and selected coping practices covary with self-transcendence.

Figure 1.1 shows how intrinsic religious motivation, adverse life events, and selected coping practices correlate with self-transcendence. The interactions between the variables are represented by the directed lines; that is, as intrinsic religious motivation increases, self-transcendence increases, and as intrinsic religious motivation decreases, self-transcendence decreases. The research questions for the present study were formulated from this theoretical model.

Research Questions

The present study endeavored to answer the following research questions using descriptive methods.

Research Question 1

Is there a relationship between age and self-transcendence in older women?

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between intrinsic religious motivation and self-transcendence in older women?

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between selected coping practices and self-transcendence in older women?

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between current stress and self-transcendence in older women?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the present study using Draur's (1995) Self-Transcendence Scale, Hoge's (1972) Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale, Folkman and Lazarus's (1988) Ways of Coping Questionnaire, and Stokes and Gordon's (1988) Stokes/Gordon Stress Scale to determine what relationships exist among self-transcendence, intrinsic religious motivation, coping practices, and adverse life events. The following hypotheses were drawn from the two studies (Draur, 1991, 1992) forming the basis of the present study, as well as from the review of literature in the domains representing the variables.

Hypothesis 1

There is a positive relationship between age and self-transcendence in a sample of older women.

Hypothesis 2

There is a positive relationship between intrinsic religious motivation and self-transcendence in a sample of older women.