Progression towards psychosocial well-being in old age

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Abstract: The impact of the lives of successful people is ineffaceable. Their influence is passed on from generation to generation even after their death. The way they managed to face life’s challenges serves as a benchmark for people who want to approach late life the way they did. This study aims to develop a framework that would guide older adults to achieving a satisfactory late life through certain accomplishments at different stages of life. A deductive approach to theory development was utilized to create a theory that would explain the occurrence of the phenomenon that was observed which is the distinct stage a person goes through prior to reaching a satisfying old age. Secondary analysis was used to analyze the data which were collected from available research studies and literatures. The generation of the theory was built on the readings and discussion about the process of growing old. Axioms were generated to be able to come up with propositions. The following propositions were generated: People go through a process of development that highlights the different ages; success is perceived individually and is equated with development; and interaction with individuals and the environment influences the way humans perceive the stages of life. From the propositions, it was concluded that human life is highlighted with individualized milestones considered as success.
achieved within specific ages, influenced by individuals and the environment, as people continuously go through the process of development.

**Subjects:** Psychological Science; Social Psychology; Psychology and Nursing; Gerontology/Ageing

**Keywords:** psychosocial well-being; late life; human development; theory development; deductive approach

1. Introduction

Aging is a process that everyone undergoes throughout life. However, this process tends to take on different meanings as individuals undergo a variety of changes (Chung et al., 2008). Old age, the last period of life, is not an identical experience for everybody. Some older persons attain a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in their later years, while others turn bitter and lament the deterioration of their physical abilities and social significance (Ardelt, 1997).

Reaching old age and retirement has been labeled as a life task in which work-related involvement has to be substituted with other purposive activities. Retired people can no longer develop contentment from occupational pursuits or raising a family, they have to discover new means to lead rewarding lives (Halisch & Geppert, n.d.). Furthermore, the society often considers that the finest age to be successful is between 24 and 40 and that, once you reach 50, your life is over (Brown, 2015). However, several older people, though they have lived longer than most of their loved ones, continue to search for meaning and joy in their existence (Watson, 1996).

Life satisfaction in older people is a multidimensional phenomenon. The world we live influences the manner we approach aging. Older people are valued because they are older and more experienced (Watson, 1996). Perception of well-being, happiness, and contentment with life is increasingly used as indicators of quality of life both on personal and societal levels (Watson, 1996).

Goal achievement is associated with life satisfaction. Individuals must adapt to changed roles and relationships that occur throughout life, such as graduation from school, marriage, finishing military service, getting hired, and retirement (Mauk, 2006). In the previous decades, collective effort has been employed on understanding and defining what constitutes healthy or successful aging which has expanded the focus of research on aging beyond physical illness and disability (Reichstadt et al., 2010). Older people place more importance on psychosocial factors as being vital to successful aging, with less emphasis on factors such as longevity, genetics, absence of illness or disability, function, and independence (Reichstadt et al., 2007).

A good number of studies looked into successful aging. Theories have long been established on the different aspects of growth and development, and of the ageing process, however, the success in each stage of development of how this contributed to successful aging was not looked into. Looking into the lives of those old people who were successful in their life pursuits will be very helpful in guiding those who aimed to live a fulfilling late life. The impact of the lives of successful people is ineffaceable. Their influence is passed on from generation to generation even after their death. The way they managed to face life's challenges serves as a benchmark for people who want to approach late life the way they did. This theoretical paper aims to explain how people achieve feelings of success in later life.

2. Methods

This study utilized Theory-building research specifically theory-then-research strategy to create a theory that would explain the occurrence of the phenomenon. This strategy is informed by corresponding assumptions about the nature of scientific knowledge, “that science is a process of inventing descriptions of phenomena” that there are multiple and divergent realities and therefore “truths,” and that the purpose of science is one of interpretive discovery and explanation of the nature and meaning of phenomena in the world in which we live and experience life.
Data were collected from literatures and studies about the ageing process and successful aging from different databases using the keywords successful aging, satisfying late life, life stages, and aging process. Only those literatures that explain the process of ageing and how these contributed to the feeling of success where included. Secondary analysis was used to analyze data that was collected from available research studies and literature. It allowed the proponent to explore certain areas about the stages of life and the aging process without going through the collection of data in the field (Babbie, 2001). These data were used to uncover consistent patterns discovered by prior scholars, which were crafted to become axioms. Relevant concepts were identified and what have already been learned about them were discovered to create propositional structures that could explain the topic under study. These were inferences derived from the axiomatic discussion.

3. Results and discussion
The readings and discussions about the process of aging were used to build the theory as what is being presented in Table 1. Over several centuries “old age” has been defined in various ways in varying contexts and for varied social groups. Old age is defined through chronology, function, or culture. A permanent threshold of “chronological” old age has been a bureaucratic expediency, suitable for establishing age parameters to rights and duties, such as access to pensions or eligibility for public service (Thane, 2003). It became more prevalent in the twentieth century, when societies became more rigidly stratified by the sequence of events, especially earlier and later in life, as ages were fixed for attendance and exit from school, for retirement and receiving pensions (Thane, 2003). These events exemplify the changes older people undergo.

People’s lives are processes of continuous change (Axiom 1). Every person’s life is highlighted with milestones of success achieved within ages as they continuously go through the process of development. People go through a process of development that highlights the different ages (Proposition 1). An aspect of development that has been subject to debate is whether it proceeds in a continuous or discontinuous manner. Continuous development suggests a measured but smooth configuration of change over time. Fundamentally, babies and children are seen as having the same basic capabilities as adults and variations take place in the efficiency and complexity of their abilities until they reach the mature, adult levels. Change is then essentially quantitative in

| Table 1. Propositional structures from axiomatic extractions |
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| **Axioms** | **Propositions** | **Theory** |
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| **Axiom 1.** People’s lives are processes of continuous change. | **Proposition 1.** People go through a process of development that highlights the different ages (Axioms 1, 2, 3). | Human life is a progression of age, which is highlighted by significant events and important people influencing the individual’s perception of success (Late Life Success Theory). |
| **Axiom 2.** Life is divided into stages. | **Proposition 2.** Success is perceived individually and is equated with development (Axioms 4, 5, 6). | |
| **Axiom 3.** Increase in age is a milestone. | **Proposition 3.** Interaction with individuals and the environment influences the way humans perceive the stages of life (Axiom 7). | |
| **Axiom 4.** Developmental milestones can be equated with success. It is often viewed as a positive motivator. | | |
| **Axiom 5.** Success is categorically individual. | | |
| **Axiom 6.** The movement through the stages of personal growth is most of the time geared towards development. | | |
| **Axiom 7.** Life stages happen with the individuals around as well as with the environment they live in. | | |
nature. Just as children grow taller and can run faster as they get older, their psychological characteristics also change in the same way, for example, they can remember more and their thought processes become more complex and sophisticated (Crowley, 2013).

On the contrary, theorists who consider that individuals develop discontinuously likewise believe individuals that they too develop in stages as they appear to develop chunks of skills to experience events at certain periods in life. The alternative discontinuous view of development states that development proceeds as a series of abrupt changes and with each change the child moves to a more advanced level of functioning. In this view, the child moves through a series of developmental stages, and with each new stage the child's behavior, abilities, or thought processes are qualitatively different to what they were in the preceding stage. Hence, life is divided into stages (Axiom 2).

The life stages such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age—are developmental stages—each of which has its own biological, psychological, and social characteristics, through which persons pass through the course of their lives. Diverse factors have contributed to a more detailed formulation of the life stages. These include scientific and medical findings that identify childhood, adolescence, and old age as biologically and psychologically distinct stages of life, with their specific necessities and characteristics, and such institutional developments as the emergence of age-graded schools, the enactment of laws barring child labor, and the adoption of old-age pensions, which contribute to the segregation of age groups from one another (Mintz, 1993).

Increase in age is a milestone (Axiom 3). Development includes the qualitative and quantitative deviations that transpire in a child. Skills such as social smiling, crawling, the first walking steps, grasping, and the first spoken word are branded as developmental milestones. Developmental milestones are a set of useful skills or age-specific tasks that most children can perform at a certain age range. Important developmental milestones that are commonly studied include gross motor, fine motor, language, and social skills (Gupta et al., 2016).

Many, if not most, developmental processes involve an identifiable moment when a new developmental ability or feature first appears. The more salient of these are often called milestones, such as when a first step is taken or when the first two-word sentence is uttered, but they may be subtle and largely unremarked. The key idea was to incorporate chronological age with a specific milestone, so that the focus is on the age of milestone attainment. Once a specific developmental destination is identified, individual differences can be captured by the variation in the ages at which children reach the milestone. In essence, different developmental phenomena are expressed on a common metric, chronological age. This is done by identifying significant age-related events and expressing those events in terms of the age at which the child reached them (Eaton et al., 2014).

Ages and Stages are words used to roughly outline crucial periods in the human development timeline. Throughout each stage, growth and development transpire in the key developmental domains including physical, intellectual, language, and social-emotional (Child Development Institute, 2013). The concept that human development passes through a sequence of stages is ingrained in antiquity. Roman authors recognized three to seven distinct ages of man, arranged from conception to death. Medieval academics and artists framed an assortment of systems of age groups, apportioning human life into three-, four-, five-, six-, seven-, ten-, and twelve-part schemata. Possibly the most recognized periodization of the human life cycle is found in William Shakespeare’s play As You Like It, where he designates seven stages of human life, starting with “puking” infancy and ending with “second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything” (Mintz, 1993).

It has been accepted long ago that there is a huge variation in the pace and timing of human aging, that people do not all age at the same rate or in the same manner. As a result, since the olden days, old age has long been distributed into stages. Some of these were intricate, such as medieval “ages of man” outline, which distributed life into three, four, seven, or twelve ages. These
conventional age divisions frequently had informative or figurative purposes. More ordinarily, in daily descriptive conversation, old age has been divided into what in early modern England was termed “green” old age—a period of fitness and activity, with possibly some deteriorating powers, and the advanced, last, phase of decrepitude; a partition which in the twentieth century is less creatively labeled “young” and “old” old age, or, in France, the Third and Fourth ages. Manuscripts referring to the decrepit final age cannot be used to express attitudes to old age in general. The miserable deterioration with which some, but not all, older lives end has never been embodied positively, in any age or culture, with good reason (Thane, 2003).

Nowadays, social scientists use the notion of the “life cycle” to refer to the division of individual lives into a series of sequential stages, such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, middle age, and old age. Each stage is defined in terms of three distinct conceptual components: biological, psychological, and social. The modern-day view of adolescence consists of a biological component—comprising pubertal physical changes, rapid physiological growth, and sexual maturation; a psychological component—encompassing drastic mood swings, inner turmoil, generational conflict, and a quest for identity; and a social component—which includes the shifting social experience, institutional treatment, and cultural definition of adolescence (Mintz, 1993).

Developmental milestones can be equated with success. It is often viewed as a positive motivator (Axiom 4). Erikson suggested that development happened in a series of stages that occurs as a lifelong process whereby its stages extend into adulthood and old age. He viewed these stages as occurring in a fixed, orderly sequence. At each stage of development, he argued that the individual is confronted with an age-related task or psychosocial crisis related to biological maturation and the social demands being faced by the individual at a particular point in their life. The successful resolution of each crisis led to healthy developmental outcomes. The individual who has successfully resolved the previous psychosocial crises will see life as having been productive and meaningful, leading to a sense of integrity, while those who resolved the stages in a negative fashion will see life as a series of unfulfilled promises and missed goals leading to feelings of despair and gloom (Crowley, 2013).

Success is categorically individual (Axiom 5). It can be a relatively abstract term and it can mean differently to different people. Perception of success would be related to an individual’s meaningful life orientation (Karabanova & Bukhalenkova, 2016). Success is dependent upon individual choices and behaviors. It can be attained through individual choice and effort (Katz & Calasanti, 2015).

The movement through the stages of personal growth is most of the time geared towards development (Axiom 6). As a person passes from one stage to the next, frequently with some challenging periods of transition, the person learns and matures in the process. Acknowledging and working through the concerns of each consecutive stage helps a person develop into better human and spiritual beings. Individuals may navigate through the stages several years earlier or later than estimated. Individuals differ extensively in their progression through the stages (Weiler & Schoonover, 2001). Thus, success is perceived individually and is equated with development (Proposition 2).

Life stages happen with the individuals around as well as with the environment they live in (Axiom 7). A variety of factors including scientific and medical discoveries, institutional developments, and the enactment of laws have added to a more accurate creation of the life stages (Mintz, 1993). Interaction with individuals and the environment influences the way humans perceive the stages of life (Proposition 3). Environmental situations and exchanges with important persons within that environment have substantial influence on how each child profits from each developmental experience (Child Development Institute, 2013). An encouraging family environment including pleasurable family activities, open parent–child communication, and the encouragement to partake in helpful extracurricular and community activities is believed to help people to navigate through life with reasonable ease (Child Development Institute, 2013).
Even the way people face old age arises from three influences: heredity, environment, and attitude. Heredity provides people the inborn characteristics. This basically means that the essence of who they are was determined through conception. This comprises mental, emotional, and social as well as physical attributes. If they were a joyful twenty years old perhaps they are now a contented eighty year old. They are still the similar person except older and wiser. If they were a cranky, rude kid, they are probably now branded as a grumpy old man (Watson, 1996).

These propositions lead towards the generation of the Late Life Success Theory. The theory suggests that human life is a progression of age. Integrated in each age are the events which offer significant highlights to individuals. These highlights are the markers of achievements. They are memorable and tend to be related with each other due to the circumstance and people that surround the event. The ages form stages that are based on the similarities of the events happening in that period of life. These stages progress from childhood to late life.

Figure 1 presents the schematic diagram of the theory. The diagram reflects the successes and failures experienced by individuals as they go through life. As an individual progresses in age, he/she is exposed to different experiences. As reflected in Figure 1, success and failures create segments or sections in an individual's life. These experiences throughout the lifeline, positive or negative, contribute to a satisfying late life. It also presents the important role of the individual and the environment in the success and failures experienced throughout life.

Figure 1 above clearly presents the applicability of the theory to feelings of success in old age, most especially those who are currently looking back at the life they lived. It is generally applicable to older people from different walks of life. As a person goes through life, exposure to individuals and the environment becomes inevitable. These exposures, which are highlighted in certain ages, form part of the experiences thus making them memorable. Experiences, positive or negative, help a person grow into a mature individual and likewise help him/her in achieving a satisfying old age.
These experiences create the stages of development based on how the person succeeds in the era of life which emphasizes old age as the ultimate measure of a successful life.

Experience teaches a person certain aspects of life in order for him/her to become a mature individual. Constant communication with family members, forming intimate relationships, marriage and divorce, death of a loved one, political issues, economic downfall, disasters and calamities, all craft a person's developmental stage. All of these point towards old age. Achieving successes in these periods of life makes it a milestone. This constant exposure together with the biological and physical development creates the definition that a certain stage might be common to all however the experience that creates it is highly individualized.

In order for a person to progress through the different stages, he/she has to be immersed in the situation and finds his/her way out successfully. Each stage is unique and is comparable to the others; therefore, a person has to successfully go through each in order to have a satisfying late life. Each stage of life is in the same way substantial and indispensable for the welfare of humanity (Armstrong, 2008).

The framework highlights old age as the ultimate goal in life. It looks at each life stage as contributory to achieving a happy old age, or simply well-being. It considers experiences as the vehicle to achieving this goal. In each stage, the possibility of personal growth is high, so with its likelihood for failure. If people successfully handle the issues, they emerge from the stage with new learning that serves them well for the entirety of their life. In simple terms, this feeling of success in turn provides the older person with holistic sense of wellness, the connection between the psychological aspect towards the physical is thereby enhanced.

4. Conclusion
It can be concluded that human life is highlighted with individualized milestones. These are considered as successes achieved within specific ages, influenced by individuals and the environment, as people continuously go through the process of development. These milestones will serve as a guide on the successes they have to undergo. Positive or negative experiences may therefore be considered as milestones of success and highlights of the stages of life.

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