



Gerotranscendence, Music, and the Baby Boom Generation

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Abstract

Lars Tornstam's theory of gerotranscendence (2005), illustrates the final stage of a natural developmental process of moving toward maturation and wisdom. Mature gerotranscendence is achieved when one shifts from identifying with an individual ego self to identifying with a transpersonal Self. This can lead to new feelings of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space, life and death, and a redefinition of self, which are feelings that music can induce. As music has played a role in the generational identity of the baby boom generation in America, this poster seeks to examine how music can be used to help foster mature gerotranscendence with members of this generation. Theoretical in nature, this poster is based on a synthesis of existing literature reviewed through the lens of my own experience as a music therapist working with older adults from the baby boom generation.

Background and Interest

The theory of gerotranscendence can be thought of as an extension of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development as it involves moving toward a place of greater acceptance and awareness of one's self and life as one continues to age.

Gerotranscendence involves three dimensions. These are the:

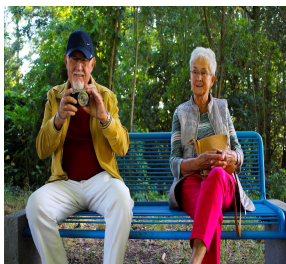
- Cosmic Dimension
- Self-Transcendent Dimension
- Social Selectivity Dimension

The theory of gerotranscendence has been researched and written about in healthcare fields such as nursing and gerontology, yet it has rarely been addressed in the field of music therapy.

As well, the baby boom generation has had a great impact on American society which has helped shift our understanding of health, aging, metaphysics and spirituality. With this, music and experiences related to music took on new levels of identification and meaning with this generation. Yet, little has been written or discussed in the field of music therapy about this generation and the possible implications they may have on music therapy practice in eldercare. By investigating this generation through the lens of gerotranscendence, this poster seeks to initiate such a discussion.

Data and Methods

A Demographic Snapshot: Assessing the Need for Mature Gerotranscendence



It is estimated that more than 20% of the total U.S. population will be over the age of 65 by 2029, with 18% being baby boomers.

Colby and Ortman, 2014

Race and Ethnicity

- While ethnically diverse, the ethnicity majority of baby boomers in the U.S. are "non-Hispanic White alone."

Colby and Ortman, 2014

Gender and Sexual Orientation

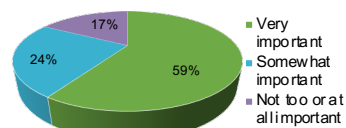
- A greater percentage of baby boomers are females rather than males.
- Currently, 2.4 million people in the U.S. over the age of 65 identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Colby and Ortman, 2014

American Psychological Association, 2019

Spiritual Beliefs

How important is religion to you?

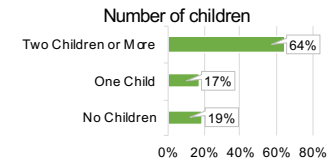


Pew Research, 2015

Family Composition

- In 2009, over 58% of unmarried baby boomers were single through divorce, while 32% never married.

Population Reference Bureau, 2014



Green, 2014

Taking a mindful inquiry approach (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998), I reviewed existing literature on gerotranscendence and the baby boom generation. With this information, I reflected on my own experiences working and interacting with older adults from this generation in order to identify ways in which music could be used to support mature gerotranscendence.

Results

In synthesizing the information obtained from the literature review with my own work and interactions with members of this generation, the following chart was devised to examine more closely the three dimensions of gerotranscendence and ways that music can be used to address these dimensions in order to foster mature gerotranscendence.

Dimension of Gerotranscendence	Musical Experiences	Rationale
Cosmic Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Active music-making▪ Musical/music-facilitated life review	Induce feelings of connectivity, "flow" and life recall
Self-Transcendent Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Music discussion▪ Song-writing▪ Active music-making	Promote healthy aging and processing the aging experience
Social Selectivity Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Guided listening▪ Music discussion▪ Song-writing	Assist in re-evaluating relationships and social roles

Discussion

As the baby boom generation in America moves into older adulthood, they face challenges unique from those faced by previous generations. Gerotranscendence is a theory of aging which could help these older adults enhance their quality of life as they navigate these personal and social challenges.

This poster examined gerotranscendence within the context of music therapy by illustrating how a variety of interventions commonly used in music therapy practice could be applied to facilitate the development of mature gerotranscendence. More research is necessary to measure the effectiveness of these experiences on gerotranscendence.

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Tavener Centre International Symposium: Music, Spirituality, Wellbeing and Theology

June 14-15, 2019

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