The pilgrimage of ageing and the search for meaning

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Questions of our ageing

• At what level does meaning lie? Is meaning satisfied by material possessions?

• Do western materialistic societies in the 21st century foster hope in people, or alienation?

• Perhaps meaning is not just about the luxury of having time and health and wealth?
Spirituality and Religion

**Relationship:** Intimacy with others and/or God

**Creation / Environment:** Nature, sea, mountains, gardens, work, human imagination

**Religion:** Worship, Prayer, Reading of Sacred texts, meditation

**The arts:** Music, art, poetry, drama, dance

MacKinlay modified (2015)
Spirituality in Ageing: Themes

Self-sufficiency/vulnerability

Response to Ultimate Meaning

Ultimate Meaning in Life

Wisdom/provisional to final meanings

Relationship/isolation

Hope/fear

MacKinlay 1998
Spiritual Tasks & Process of Ageing: A continuing process

Transcend loss/disabilities

To find final meanings

Response to Ultimate Meaning

Ultimate Meaning in Life

Find intimacy with God and/or others

To find hope

MacKinlay 1998
Spirituality in Ageing: vulnerability & transcendence

Fear of vulnerability may retard ability to transcend

Lowered energy may assist transcendence

self sufficiency/vulnerability

Response to Ultimate Meaning

Ultimate Meaning in Life

MacKinlay 2009
Self-transcendence and humour: a spiritual process related to life meaning

Transcendence: A spiritual task of ageing

Humour: Promotes transcendence and is an outcome of transcendence

Transcendence: mediated through losses and disabilities

Ultimate life meaning

MacKinlay 2006
Spirituality-through the eyes of a person with dementia

At the centre of our being lies the true self, what identifies us to be truly human, truly unique, and truly the person we were born to be. This is our spiritual heart, the centre from which we draw meaning in this rush from birth to death, whenever we pause long enough to look beyond our cognition, through our clouded emotions into what lies within.

Bryden 2005 (Dancing with Dementia)
The tragic triad of human existence.

- The first triad Frankl described as one of freedom of will, will to meaning and meaning of life
- Meaning of life is comprises the second triad – the creative, experiential and attitudinal values taken up by people
- the third (tragic) triad arises from attitudinal values –meaningful attitudes towards pain, guilt, and death (Frankl 1988, p73)
the baby boomer study

Sample of baby boomers drawn from:
1. Uniting Church NSW/ACT congregation members
2. UnitingCareAgeing NSW&ACT care providers
3. UnitingCare Ageing NSW & ACT care recipients’ adult children with parents in care

Survey = 143

Focus groups = 6 (2 from each subsample) = 22 participants
Major findings of the survey

Two main findings:

• *Spirituality promotes mental and physical health and lowers anxiety about ageing.*

• *Baby boomers are not necessarily affiliated with religious organisations but according to the results of the survey have higher levels of spirituality.*
Selected recent studies in spirituality and ageing


