

# MATURING INTO GEROTRASCENDENCE

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*ABSTRACT:* According to the empirically based theory of gerotranscendence, the individual moving toward gerotranscendence may experience a series of gerotranscendental changes or developments. These include a redefinition of the self and of relationships to others, as well as a new understanding of fundamental existential questions. It is not farfetched to associate this with a kind of transpersonal development. Gerotranscendence, however, does not imply any state of withdrawal or disengagement, as is sometimes believed. It is not the old disengagement theory in a new disguise. Rather, it is a theory describing a developmental pattern that goes beyond the old dualism of activity and disengagement. Research in various parts of the world confirms the existence of gerotranscendence, and lately a promising new type of counseling based on the theory has been created in countries as widely dispersed as Sweden and Taiwan.

Author Note: The theory of gerotranscendence was born, almost 25 years ago, to address what I saw as a mismatch between present theories in social gerontology and some existing empirical data. Based on intellectual input from scholars such as Jung and Erikson, together with qualitative as well as quantitative data, I have been able to capture a certain kind of positive aging in a grounded-theory-like concept I have called gerotranscendence. The theory suggests that human aging includes a potential to mature into a new outlook on and understanding of life. Gerotranscendence implies a shift in meta-perspective, from a materialistic and rational view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction.

## RETHINKING PUZZLING FINDINGS

Since the very beginning of scientific gerontology, the misery perspective has been a recurrent theme in the research. Gerontologists have predicted, as I have as well, various problems connected with aging and old age, and have been puzzled when, for example, retirement is not typically perceived as a trauma or when old people do not report as much loneliness as we expect them to. To date, many studies have shown that retirement does not normally imply a trauma, and lately Westerlund et al. (2009) found, in their very large longitudinal study, that when it comes to subjective health and well-being, retirement even seems to serve as a kind of rejuvenating cure. On average, retirement makes people feel healthier and better than they did prior to retirement. In Sweden, repeated surveys have shown that, on average, problems of loneliness do not increase with age as most people believe, but

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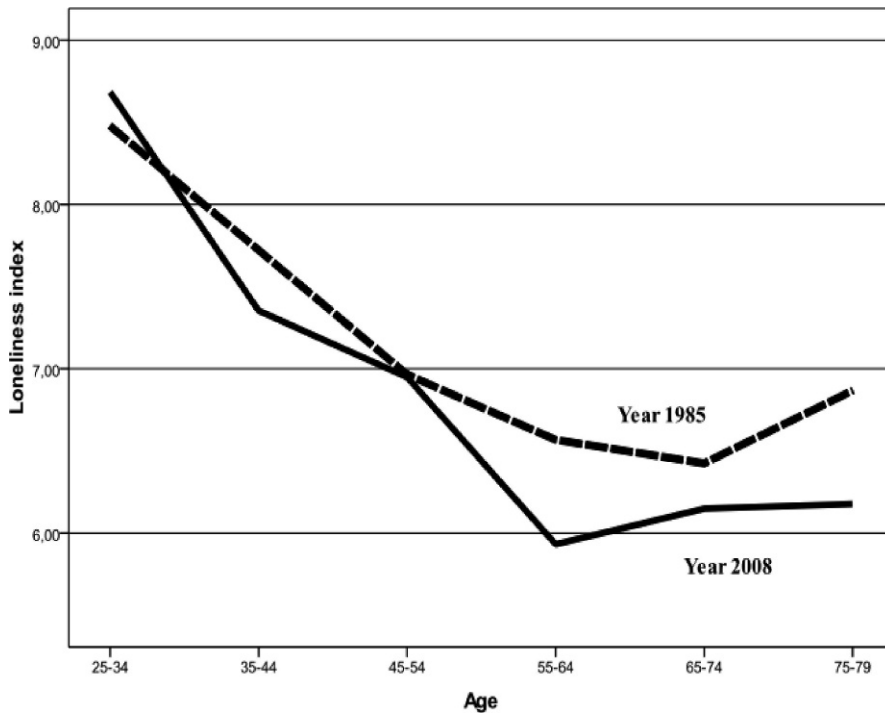


Figure 1. Loneliness among Swedes in 1985 and 2008.

rather decrease with age (Tornstam, Rydell, Vik, & Öberg, 2010). Figure 1 summarizes two postal surveys in which questions about loneliness were answered by 2,795 Swedes in 1985, and 1,742 Swedes in 2008. The degree of loneliness, as reproduced in the graph, is an index based on questions concerning how often the respondent feels lonely, how intense the feeling is when it occurs, how much loneliness the respondent feels as compared to how the respondent thinks others of the same age feel, whether the respondent feels lonely in the company of others and whether the respondent feels lonely right now.

When examining the graph, note that it is a “blow-up” of the part of the index scale on which the mean values and slopes are located. The scale as such varies from 0 to 18. This also means that all differences are blown up. This said, the two most striking features in the figure must be (a) how loneliness basically declines with age, and (b) how similar the results are across the 23-year period. If we accept these as factual invariances and try to understand them, a number of possible explanations come to the fore. One such explanation might be that, as we age and mature, we learn to handle life better, another that when aging, we also transcend some barriers surrounding our Selves and thus become more “transpersonal” and less prone to feeling lonely.

I have described the above and other perplexing findings elsewhere (Tornstam, 2005), as well as our tendency to explain them away as “errors in methods” rather than as “errors in theory.” We social scientists can be very imaginative

when, for example, trying to explain away the findings presented in Figure 1. If, for example, you only take the data from 1985 into consideration and only look at the last two age categories, at the same time as you change the index scale to cover only values from 6.0 to 7.0, you get a blow-up that certainly seems to confirm the assumption of increasing loneliness with age, even though this blow-up difference is not statistically significant. And to be sure, all studies have their drawbacks, but why must we always try to use the “error in methods” argument when we are confronted with interesting contradicting data that in fact imply that reality does not adhere to theory?

Experiencing just that, and dissatisfied with the state of the art, I began more than 20 years ago to experiment with some new theoretical ideas and studies in an attempt to achieve a better match between the empirical data and theory. Inspired by, among others, Jung (1930), Gutmann (1976) and Chinen (1985, 1986), I started conducting qualitative interviews with old people, who told about how they had perceived their lives in various phases and transitions. It was then I discovered how life was often described as a positive development involving increased life satisfaction in the context of a developmental pattern typically including a redefinition of the self and relations to other people, as well as a new way of understanding existential questions. These informants described how they had become less self-occupied and at the same time more selective in their choice of social and other activities. A transpersonal sense of affinity with others and with earlier generations had developed, as well as a sense of being part of a whole. Informants also talked about a kind of redefinition of time, space, life and death, and an increased need for positive contemplative solitude. These changes are often misunderstood by relatives, who label them as pathological. Old mothers are thought to be depressed, lonely, lacking in activities or on the brink of some kind of dementia. However, the individuals we interviewed did not suffer from any pathological conditions. They enjoyed life and expressed great satisfaction. What I saw in these early interviews was the unfolding of a new and intriguing developmental pattern, and I decided to use the term Gerotranscendence to describe it<sup>1</sup>. I chose the prefix *Gero-* as in gerontology and the suffix *transcendence*, because it seemed to me that much of what my informants described concerned transcending borders and barriers that had circumscribed them earlier in life. Based on these early qualitative interviews, I conducted a number of large quantitative studies, which are described in Tornstam (2005). In these studies, different random samples of Swedish and Danish inhabitants in the age range 20 and 104 years were kind enough to answer questions about their outlook on life, themselves and their relations to others. Without going into technical details, I will provide a brief summary of how these studies together define and describe gerotranscendence in relation to three major dimensions and their respective signs. In each of the dimensions, I have gathered signs that qualitatively belong together. *The Cosmic dimension* is about broad existential changes, while the dimension of *The self* concerns changes in the view of the present self and the

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<sup>1</sup>The theory of gerotranscendence now has its own Internet site: [www.soc.uu.se/research/gerontology/gerotrans](http://www.soc.uu.se/research/gerontology/gerotrans)

self in retrospect. The dimension of *Social and Personal Relationships* captures developmental changes in precisely these matters.

Please note that not everyone who has developed in the direction of gerotranscendence necessarily shows all these signs.

## THE COSMIC DIMENSION

### Time and Childhood

The definition of time is changed so that, for example, today and yesterday can be present at the same time. The borderline between now and then is transcended, and this may also include a return to and reconfiguration of childhood. Like the layers of an onion, all ages are available at the same time, but when returning to the inner layers, to childhood, things are observed that could not be seen then, and reinterpretations are made of events and situations from childhood or other earlier periods in life. Such reinterpretations frequently include some kind of reconciliation, as was the case for the old woman who had been mistreated by her mother as a child, and who now understood her troubled mother in a new way and was able to reconcile with her, 20 years after her death.

The transcendence of time can be so vivid that you feel you can have conversations with ancient philosophers, although you know it is impossible. This was the case for one of our informants. “When I was young,” the informant said, “Plato was hard to imagine as a living person, but as years have gone by, he has come alive and now I can discuss things with him – though I know it’s not possible.” Thus, if someone talks with delight about his or her conversations with Plato, we should perhaps refrain from automatically putting a “diagnosis” on this without inquiring into it more deeply.

In a representative Swedish postal survey (Tornstam, 2003), 52 percent of the 1,215 respondents in the age range 74–100 years agreed with the statement ‘Today (as compared to when I was 50) I feel that the distance between past and present is disappearing.’

### Connection to Earlier Generations

An increased feeling of being part of the flow of generations. As one of the informants metaphorically put it: When I was young, I felt like an isolated lonely little spot in the universe, but nowadays I feel like a link in a generational chain, where the chain itself is the important thing, not me, just a single link. In the above-mentioned quantitative study (Tornstam, 2003), 61 percent agreed with the statement ‘Today (as compared to when 50) I feel a greater sense of belonging with both earlier and coming generations.’ Furthermore, 52 percent agreed with the statement ‘Today I feel to a higher

degree how unimportant an individual life is in comparison with the continuation of life as such.'

### **Life and Death**

Based on the above-described change in perspective, from being an isolated point in the universe to part of a generational chain, we get a new way of comprehending what we have long known within gerontology—the seemingly contradictory fact that most people become less afraid of death as they get closer to it. This may have nothing to do with defense mechanisms, as has sometimes been suggested.

Here we also see very relaxed and sometimes intriguing ways of talking about life and death, like when one informant talked about how much she loves life and how much pleasure life gives, and at the same time explained that if she were to die tomorrow it would not matter! From the perspective of a young person, such a statement may signal that somebody is not mentally stable, but for the person who has transcended this duality, it may sound like wisdom. Transcendence of the life-death duality is also manifested by the fact that 68 percent of respondents 74–100 years of age agreed with the statement that 'Today I feel that the border between life and death is less striking compared to when I was 50 years of age' (Tornstam, 2003).

### **Mystery of Life**

The mystery dimension of life is accepted. The intellectual restriction that everything in life must be explained within traditional scientific boundaries is transcended. As one informant explained, while in the midst of her academic career, she was obsessed with finding scientific explanations for everything, but gradually this obsession gave way to an acceptance of the notion that the human intellect may well have its limits.

This is reminiscent of Chinen's (1989) analysis of the changing attitudes toward science expressed by two outstanding scientists: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Alfred North Whitehead. Both of them softened their views on science from a rather rigid and self-assured stance in their younger years, to a more pragmatic attitude in mid-life, and finally to a transcendent outlook in old age. They then both evidenced a radical transcendence of the borderlines between scientific disciplines as well as an acceptance of nonscientific explanations. To Chinen's observations one could add other examples of well-known scientists who have developed in a similar way – Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Albert Einstein, and Niels Bohr, to name a few.

### **Rejoicing**

From grand events to subtle experiences. The joy of experiencing the macrocosm through the microcosm materializes, often related to experiences

in nature, such as by experiencing a transcendence into the universe when looking at a flower. Also mentioned by several informants is how music has come to be experienced as a qualitatively new language, giving access to a new dimension of reality. In the aforementioned study (Tornstam, 2003) of Swedes in the age range 74–100 years, 28 percent agreed with the statement ‘Today I feel a greater mutual connection with the universe, compared to when I was 50 years of age.’

## THE SELF

### **Self-Confrontation**

Figuratively speaking, the individual looks back on himself at earlier phases in life and discovers hidden aspects of the self – both good and bad. This is quite close to what Jung (1930) referred to as one of the tasks in the second half of life, discovering the hidden aspects of the personality—the shadow. Some of our informants also reported that this is connected with a new awareness and reluctance to project one’s own dark sides on others. Sometimes the discovery can be quite joyful, as it was for one informant, who at age 80 discovered she had the gift to write such good poetry that she published her first book of poems at that age. I’ve lived most of my life without knowing about this gift, she explained.

### **Decrease in Self-Centeredness**

The individual experiences a new awareness of the fact that he or she is not the center of the universe. In an illustrative interview, one male informant admitted with a laugh that during working life he really thought he was the most important person on earth and more or less the center of the universe. Now he admits with relief that he is not. His overly elevated self-esteem had taken on more realistic proportions.

However, if self-esteem was low from the beginning, it may instead be a question of struggling to establish a level of confidence that feels appropriate.

In the above-mentioned study (Tornstam, 2003) of Swedes 74–100 years of age, 73 percent agreed with the statement ‘Today I take myself less seriously than earlier.’

### **Body-Transcendence**

A new awareness develops of how to take good care of the body without being obsessed with it. Female informants in particular talked about how an earlier obsession with the body and beauty has been replaced with pleasing acceptance, which has resulted in greater satisfaction with the body and appearance, as compared to when they were young.

## **Self-Transcendence**

Looking back, the individual notices how the focus on one's own needs has gradually been transcended and replaced with a focus on the needs of others – in particular the needs of children and grandchildren. Egoism has been overshadowed by altruism. The male informants in particular talked about this change.

## **Ego-Integrity**

Here I have borrowed a concept from Erikson (1950), because what is described by gerotranscendent individuals is close but not identical to what Erikson called ego-integrity – when the individual achieves a fundamental acceptance of his/her own life, as a jigsaw puzzle finally coming together and forming a whole. Yes, the informants described a new sense of wholeness and coherence in life, but not necessarily a 100 percent good one. Using Ingrid Bergman's metaphor might clarify the difference: "*Getting old is like climbing a mountain; you get a little out of breath, but the view is much better!*" Yes, you can see the wholeness of the view, and how the bad parts fit into this view, and even if you are a little out of breath it is stunning, and it gives a view not only of the individual past, but also of the sky and the mountains in the distance. The life lived is fitted into a new frame of reference. In Erikson's theory, ego-integration primarily refers to an integration of the elements in the life that has passed. The individual reaches a fundamental acceptance of the life lived. In this way, the ego-integrity described by Erikson is more of a reverse integration process within the same definition of the world as before, while the process of gerotranscendence implies more of a forward or outward direction, including a redefinition of reality.

## **SOCIAL AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Changed Meaning and Importance of Relations**

The informants described how they have become more selective in their choice of company. The interest in participating in superficial kinds of socializing fades away. For example, informants told about how their earlier interest in mingling at cocktail parties has given way to being with a particular friend or staying at home contemplating. I have seen cases where the children of a person developing in this way have erroneously interpreted this development as a sign of depression. Part of this changed meaning and importance of relations is also the increased need for positive contemplative solitude, as was reported by most of our informants and confirmed in the quantitative studies.

In the above-mentioned study (Tornstam, 2003) of 74- to 100-year-old Swedes, 71 percent agreed with the statement 'Today I am less interested in superficial social contacts', and 65 percent agreed with the statement 'Today I have more delight in my inner world, i.e., pondering, compared with when I was 50.'

## **Dealing with Role Playing in Life**

The individual reaches an understanding of the difference between self and the roles played in life, sometimes feeling an urge to abandon and transcend roles in order to come closer to the genuine self, which may also be manifested as a new comforting understanding of why roleplaying has been necessary in life.

## **Emancipated Innocence**

The individual develops a new skill to transcend needless conventions, norms and rules, which earlier in life had curtailed freedom to express the self. The individual who earlier in life was afraid to ask questions when listening to a lecture, now boldly asks them even if someone might laugh or think the question was stupid. Some individuals really make a game of their new emancipated innocence, like the woman who nowadays enjoys bicycling around with torn stockings and giggling, breaking the futile rule of not wearing torn stockings – a rule she was a captive of in younger days.

Another example is the old man who took part in a quite formal and ritual birthday dinner, and while waiting to be seated put his cocktail away, took his tuxedo jacket off and, crawling on hands and knees, followed the kids in under the long table – playing ‘follow-the-leader’.

## **Modern Asceticism**

The emergence of a new understanding that the last part of the journey through life is easier and more joyful if one is carrying light luggage – if one has enough to meet the modern definition of the necessities of life, but no more. Some individuals start giving away things to children, grandchildren and others. In the above-mentioned Swedish mail survey (Tornstam, 2003), 81 percent of the respondents 74–100 years of age agreed with the statement ‘Today material things mean less, compared with when I was 50.’

## **Transcendent Everyday Wisdom**

Being cocksure about right and wrong, good and bad, as in youth and sometimes even in midlife, gives way to an understanding that the answer is seldom that easy in reality. A reluctance to superficially separate right from wrong, and thus withholding from judgments and giving advice, is discerned. The transcendence of the right-wrong duality is accompanied by an increased broadmindedness and tolerance. In this perspective, the ‘stubborn’ cocksure old gaffer, when encountered on occasion, can be understood as an individual who has been hindered in his or her development.



## ON AVERAGE, GEROTRASCENDENCE DEVELOPS WITH AGE, AND SEEMS TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED LIFE SATISFACTION

As the quantitative examples above show, significant proportions of individuals 74+ testify how they have changed and developed in the way described by gerotranscendence theory. A couple of studies, in which younger respondents were also included, can further illustrate this observation. One of these studies was a postal survey sent to a representative sample of 2,002 Swedes in the age range 20–85 years (Tornstam, 1997a), and the other a similar postal survey answered by 1,771 representative Swedes 65–104 years of age (Tornstam, 2003). The respondents in these studies had to read a number of statements, derived from earlier qualitative studies, and rate how poorly or well the statements agreed with their own experience. A factor analysis brought together the following statements in a coherent dimension that I called Cosmic Transcendence, because it was related more than anything else to the above-described dimension of the same name.

- I feel connected with the entire universe
- I feel that I am a part of everything alive
- I can feel a strong presence of people who are elsewhere
- Sometimes I feel like I live in the past and present simultaneously
- I feel a strong connection with earlier generations

Figure 2, which is compiled from the two above-mentioned studies, shows an average pattern with a gradual increase in transcendence, starting already in young adulthood. The graph also shows that women display more of this cosmic transcendence than men do, but this difference between men and women decreases with age and has disappeared in the age category 65–74 years. Those versed in quantitative methodology may object that the observed differences between age groups could be generational rather than developmental differences. However, when these quantitative data are interpreted in the light of what has been reported in the qualitative interviews, they suggest that we really are dealing with a developmental pattern.

Among the oldest respondents, those 85+, the difference between men and women has reappeared. The women, on average, continue the increase in gerotranscendence while the men seem to fall back slightly. How this should be explained is unclear, and I will leave that question for now and instead focus on the larger difference between men and women in the age category 25–44 years. Here it is revealed that this difference may have something to do with the positive developmental crisis that occurs for many women when they give birth to their first child. Childless women in fact have an age slope almost identical to that of men in Figure 2. Thus, giving birth to a child can for many women be seen as a developmental crisis that at the same time stimulates the development of cosmic transcendence. However, this developmental crisis is but one of the many crises that might stimulate the development of cosmic transcendence. This has been especially targeted in two of the postal surveys (Tornstam, 1997b, 2003) where the respondents were asked whether they had experienced something they themselves labeled a life crisis during the past two

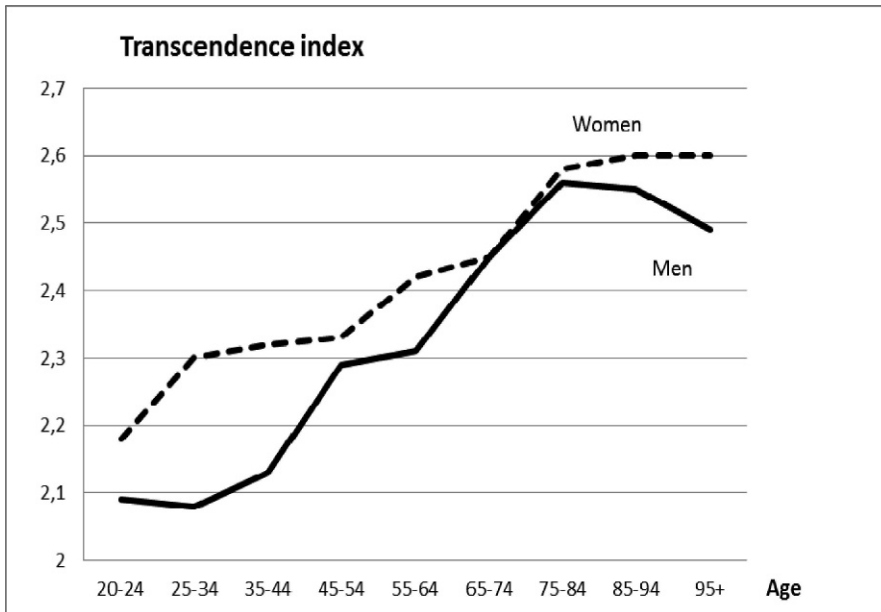


Figure 2. Cosmic transcendence in various age groups.

years. This revealed a pattern in which “younger” respondents (up to around 55 years) who had experienced crises also scored higher on cosmic transcendence as compared to respondents who had not experienced any crises. It also showed that the transcendence boosting effect of crises was larger for women than for men. However, the older the respondent, the less significant this transcendence-boosting effect of crises. Among the oldest women, the degree of cosmic transcendence was the same (high) regardless of whether or not they had experienced crises during the past two years. Worded and generalized in another way, it is only when one is young that crises can boost transcendence somewhat. When one is older the development has occurred anyway.

Studies by other researchers have also revealed that with gerotranscendence comes more coherence and life satisfaction. Working in Holland, Braam, Braam, Bramsen, van Tilburg, van der Ploeg, & Deeg (2006) found a significant correlation between the Cosmic Transcendence dimension and the feeling of coherence and meaning in life. Among the 928 Dutch people in the age range 67–82 years, who answered the postal survey, a clear such correlation was found ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ). It was also found that this correlation was somewhat stronger among women as compared to men, and among respondents 75+ as compared to younger ones.

From the US, Scarcello (2010) reported on a study of a special group of 50+ women – those who think life has become much better, not worse, after turning 50. Scarcello referred to these women as the Women of Harvest, who after the menopause enter the Open Fields on which old barriers and borderlines are transcended and wisdom harvested. It was first when her data collection was

finished and the content of the interviews organized, that she learned about gerotranscendence and was stunned by how well these Women of Harvest fitted into the description of gerotranscendence. It is also quite interesting that a gerontologist, the 80+ Professor Emeritus Edmund Sherman (2010, p.5), in his book *Contemplative Aging: A Way of Being in Later Life*, confessed that ‘... many of the things my colleagues and I have written about later life, based on the “objective” findings of gerontological research and practice, feel different when experienced personally.

From Japan, Nakagawa (2007) reported on the use of an adapted Japanese gerotranscendence scale, where the degree of gerotranscendence on average increases with age, but where the expected correlation with life satisfaction does not appear in the small sample (n = 133). Nakagawa (2008) also reported that in Japan, as in Sweden, there are many individuals who recognize themselves in the theory of gerotranscendence as well as individuals who do not.

From Taiwan, Ling Yu (2008) reported on a study showing that gerotranscendence correlated with life satisfaction and religiosity.

It is striking how many old people react with recognition and relief when they learn about gerotranscendence. They have noticed the development within, but at the same time seen how this clashes with the expectation that they should be the same person as in midlife. In August 2010, The New York Times Health Blog (<http://newoldage.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/30/appreciating-the-peculiar-virtues-of-old-age/#more-4877>) posted an article about gerotranscendence, and it is striking how many of the reader comments included this element of recognition and relief. Moreover, after learning about gerotranscendence, professionals working with and among old people often have “aha” experiences that allow them to understand specific old persons.

## DISCUSSION AND BEYOND

Quantitatively the average level of gerotranscendence, as measured in various studies (Tornstam, 1994, 1997a, b, 1999, 2003), correlates positively with age, but within this correlation it is still a fact that far from everyone reaches high levels of gerotranscendence. A rough estimate may be that only 20 percent of the population automatically reaches high degrees of gerotranscendence without trouble. It seems that, for many of us, the process is slowed down or blocked for various reasons. One of these reasons is the expectations many of us hold, that aging should involve a continuation of the same values, interests and activities as in midlife, just as many professionals working with elderly also believe.

But, what happens with those of us who are stopped, or stop ourselves, in the process of *growing* old – i.e., who are stopped in the developmental process? Jung (1930), who challenged the psychology of his time by stating that maturation is a lifelong process, maintained that, in our part of the world, it is

a tragedy that many of us live our entire lives with the erroneous idea that it is only during the first half of life that we develop and mature. Practicing such a way of life ends up in our dying as only half-matured individuals. Then, according to Jung, we develop psychiatric symptoms including depression, anxiety, fear of death, disgust and a feeling that life has been stolen from us. For some, suicide becomes the final escape from this.

It may be worthwhile to open up the discussion and consider the idea that some old people who really are suffering from, for example, anxiety and depression may *not* be suffering as a consequence of retirement, loneliness or old age as such, but rather as a result of being hindered or hindering themselves in their developmental process. Thinking this way allows us to use the theory of gerotranscendence as a basis for therapeutic efforts of various kinds. From Taiwan, Yun-Hsuan (2008) reported on a successful method of basing counseling of old persons in institutions on gerotranscendence theory. He found that those who discussed gerotranscendence in group sessions experienced reduced depression levels and instead reached higher levels of life satisfaction, as compared to a control group in which other matters were discussed. A similar type of experiment in Sweden was reported by Pevik-Fasth (2009). Here, a group of non-institutionalized men and women in the age range 80–90 years met 12 times during a 6-month period and discussed life development issues under the guidance of Pevik-Fasth, who is a professional therapist. Evaluation of the intervention showed that some of the participants recognized themselves in part of the gerotranscendence developmental pattern already from the start and were stimulated to take further steps in the same direction, while others discovered new possibilities for personal development and would gladly allow themselves to move in this direction. As a professional therapist, Pevik-Fasth anticipated that life development issues might evoke anxiety in some of the participants, and was prepared to handle this. Although none of the participants exhibited any anxiety, it is advisable to be prepared to handle such issues when starting group discussions of this kind.

A less invasive way of using the theory of gerotranscendence is to make staff members aware of this developmental possibility and of how to behave so as not to misinterpret or block care recipients who exhibit signs of gerotranscendent development. Wadensten (2003, 2007a,b,c) has translated the theory into guidelines for staff members. The Preamble of these guidelines is to accept signs of gerotranscendence as possibly normal signs of the aging process. Examples of other guidelines are:

- Understand and respect that older people can have a different perception of time, such that the boundaries between past, present and future are transcended.
- Do encourage the older person to recall and talk about childhood and old times, and how they have developed during life.
- Do let older people decide for themselves whether they want to be alone or participate in “activities.”
- Do not always start a conversation with a routine health question like “how do you feel today.” In the morning you can instead ask what

dreams the old person has had, and start a discussion about what message might be inherent in the dream.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Yet to develop and explore, are exercises for individual contemplative use. In my book *Gerotranscendence* (Tornstam, 2005), I give some advice on how it might be possible to derive such exercises from the theory. For my own purposes, I have found it quite a pleasure to use the three transpersonal exercises below:

#### **The Time and Place Exercise**

Pick out a philosopher, novelist, playwright, or composer from the past who has made an impression on you and imagine that you are living at the same time, and are present in the same room. Imagine that you have a discussion with this person. Try to transcend the feeling that this is an exercise and evoke the feeling that you really are living simultaneously. Try to discover what feelings and opinions you have in common. How does this exercise affect you?

#### **The Generation Chain Exercise**

Try to imagine that your individuality is part of something larger. You are not an isolated individual but part of a chain of human beings with many more commonalities than differences. Try to visualize an infinite genetic chain to which you belong. Try to understand that within this genetic chain you have eternal life. Feel the peace that comes with this insight.

#### **Being a Flower**

Go outdoors and find a beautiful flower you like. Concentrate on the flower and contemplate the fact that you and the flower are made of the very same basic molecular components. Try to comprehend that this means the flower is part of you, and you are part of the flower, at the same time as both you and the flower are parts of the universe. Try to feel how the separateness of you and the flower is transcended and replaced with a feeling of a wholeness and togetherness. You and the flower are the same. Experience the joy and pleasure of this comprehension.

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### The Author

*Lars Tornstam*, Ph.D., a sociologist by education, has a major interest in the field of gerontology, within research, education and social policy. At the Uppsala University he defended the first Swedish thesis within the field of gerontological sociology in the year 1973. At the same university he also, in the year 1975, started the first Swedish academic courses in gerontology. In 2006 he was awarded by the Swedish journal *Äldreomsorg [Old Age Care]* with a so called Value Ground Award for important contributions to a more balanced view on aged people and aging, and for his theory of gerotranscendence. In 2006 he also was awarded by the Swedish Gerontological Society with the 2006 Great Gerontology Award for his outstanding contributions to gerontological research.

An informal and amusing appreciation has been shown by author Jaki Scarcello, who wittingly places Lars Tornstam in a Rogues Gallery, together with celebrities like Carl Jung, Joan Erikson and Betty Friedan, who boldly told their stories despite condemning or deaf contemporaries.