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Reflections of Ego Integrity in Older Women
through Autophotography

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Reflections of Ego Integrity in Older Women through Autophotography

In Erikson's developmental stage Ego Integrity, the older individual reflects on past life experiences and depending on the individual s/he may be in a state of despair or in a state of completeness and gain a sense of wisdom. In this pilot study we analyzed ego integrity in 3 older women (ages 72-88) using Boylin's (1976) Ego Integrity Scale. The participants also completed an autophotographic task (Ziller, 1990; Clancy & Dollinger, 1993). In this task they answered the question "who are you?" using photos. Results showed a significant correlation between Ego Integrity scores and autophotgraphies themes of interpersonal relationships ($r = .99$, $p < .01$), photos of people touching ($r = .99$, $p = .03$), and life continuity ($r = .998$, $p = .012$). Future testing should look closer at these themes in a larger more diverse sample.

Literature Review

Erikson proposed that individuals proceed through developmental stages. This study focuses the last of Erikson's stages, Ego Integrity, and used autophotography as a means to reflect this stage in a sample of older adults. Ego Integrity is "the ability to put the past in perspective, live in the present, and not fear the future." (Fisherman, 1992) In the autophotography method, participants answer the question "who are you?" by taking a number of photographs. Individuals in the present study were also invited to use past photographs if they wished. This method allows for a creative, more self-directed, nonverbal expression that may not be captured from standard questionnaires and interview methods. This pilot study was designed to examine the expression of ego integrity through autophotography in older adults.

Erikson's Developmental Stages

Individuals are affected by their roles in society, how these roles interact with others, and contribute to society. As an individual experiences a role change they may evaluate how they contribute to society. Erikson (1982) proposed that the individual can emotionally respond to the role change in either a positive or negative manner. In Erikson's model of psycho-social development there is a central "crisis" or conflict, a "sphere of social interaction," a "self-definition," and a "virtue" if crisis is resolved in a positive way (Erikson, 1982). With each stage or identity crisis one may experience turmoil or at the least confusion in deciding on how to resolve his/her identity confusion. Kroger (2000) interprets Erikson's view of a successful resolution as one having gained a new, broader, way in which to "define" their self along with gaining a virtue or a "psychological strength" which helps him/her cope and understand life.

Ego Integrity

In Erikson's last stage, an individual confronts his/her own death in "ego integrity vs. despair." In gaining ego integrity one finds a sense of completion in coming to terms with the approaching end of their life. One may search for meaning in their life, or ways in which they have made a positive difference in another's life or their community. In reviewing their past choices they have made in life (e.g. decisions they made as a parent or an examination of one's religious faith). They may reassess whether or not they lived by certain values. How one answers such deep questions may lead them into despair or ego integrity. Within this conflict a person can understand how their life has connected with others, enhanced the world, acquire an understanding, thus gaining the virtue of wisdom. An individual reflecting on their life may find meaning and feel satisfied. Individuals who find meaning within the process of life (i.e. life cycle) gain what Erikson called wisdom, in which individuals come to the self-definition of "I am what survives me" (Erikson, 1982). They may have this understanding after realizing their efforts and hard work during their lifetime will benefit the next generation. They may feel as if apart of them will live on, whether it is through raising children or servicing their community. Contrary to this view, another individual may reminisce and have regrets from the past, find life meaningless, or have feelings of bitterness towards life, and encounter complete despair. For example, one may look back and have regrets about not choosing a better career path or having marital affair. These individuals may not find a feeling of living on after they have passed away, thus being in a state of despair.

Fisherman (1992) studied the relation between Ego Integrity, Life Review, and Death Anxiety in older adults (ages 65-93). Level of ego integrity was based on the

Adult Ego Development Scale. Life review was measured by the Life Review Questionnaire, which was the percentage of one's past remembered in relation to their negative emotions with those memories. This study found a negative correlation between ego integrity and life review. Fisherman justified this result by rationalizing that one will have negative emotions and frequently think about memories or situations that are unresolved. However, a possible shortcoming of this study is how the Life Review Questionnaire interprets participants' feelings in relation to their memories. This questionnaire may not accurately reflect the participant's *present feelings* about the memory. The focus of the Life Review Questionnaire is on the negative emotions only and this may be the reason for a negative correlation between ego integrity and life review. One may have negative memories, have dealt with those negative emotions, and have a feeling of completeness – something that was not captured by the Life Review Questionnaire.

Fisherman's finding is interesting because it conflicts with findings by Boylin and colleagues (1976), who found that reminiscing (along with positive affect) was positively correlated with ego integrity ($r = .45, p = .005$). In Boylin's study, reminiscing was determined by the frequency of remembered events. This conflict is important because the present study uses a different method to understand what the participant remembers and how this reflects their level of ego integrity. This autophotographic method used in the present study allowed the participant to explore their past in a unique way, further than the standard interview or questionnaire.

Themes in Late Adulthood

A study by Sherman and Peak (1991) investigated patterns of reminiscing and "late life adjustment," which was measured by an Ego Integrity Scale. In addition to measuring late life adjustment, they also measured affect or mood. Three patterns of reminiscing emerged: Self-assured (purpose was for pleasure, self-identification, or entertainment), Present Problem Solving, and Existential/Self-understanding. They found a high correlation between "self-assured" groups with positive affect and no correlation with late life adjustment. However, they did find that those who were in the "self-assured" group reported having certain characteristics of "problem solving" and "existential/self-understanding" associated with the highest ego integrity scores. Specifically within the problem solving characteristics, high ego integrity participants reminisced to "make future plans" and specifically within the self-understanding characteristics, participants reminisced to "achieve better understanding of self." Thus, those having achieved high ego integrity may show signs of all three reminiscing patterns, with "Self-assured" being the dominant theme. This is relevant to the present study because in the autophotography participants may show themes of self-assuredness, problem solving, and self-understanding. These themes may be reflected in their autophotography by revealing possible features of sexual identity, religious beliefs, ties with family, or connections with the community.

Personal identity has been related to commitments (Lowenthal, 1977; Coleman, 1992) in regards to how one spends their time in a meaningful way. This effort or commitment becomes part of your identity. Lowenthal (1977) described several areas of commitments such as interpersonal relationships, specific areas of competence, moral and

ethical issues, and individual survival. Jane Kroger (2002) examined identity processes and content of older adults. Kroger identified several processes or themes of identity re-formation and maintenance in older adults. These processes included sense of life continuity, meaning of community roles, interpersonal relationships, identity defining commitments, reminiscing, philosophy of life/religion, public confirmation of role/talent, creative work, memorabilia, perception of loss, and leisure activities. Combinations of these themes may be aspects of ego integrity. Kroger's themes seem to correspond with that of Sherman & Peak's (1991) themes of self assured (interpersonal relationships, public confirmation of role/talent, leisure activities), problem solving (creative work, perception of loss), and existential/self-understanding (philosophy of life/religion, memorabilia, creative work, reminiscing).

Autophotography

Studies have used autophotography as a non-verbal method to understand identity, social connections, and creativity (e.g. see Dollinger & Clancy, 1993 & Ziller, 1990). This method is an additional tool to assess self-representation and identity and in young and middle aged adults.

Dollinger and Clancy (1993) studied differences in gender and age (18-49) using an autophotographic method. A positive correlation ($r = .17, p < .05$) was found between social connectedness and age among women. This is important to the present study since only older women were evaluated. It was expected that the older women would present many pictures revealing their social connections. Another important finding of Dollinger & Clancy (1993) was the increase of religious depictions with age ($r = .31, p < .001$).

This is another theme to expect for the participants since they are older who maybe facing more faith based issues.

A more recent study has shown a difference in richness of pictures presented by young and middle aged adults (Dollinger & Clancy Dollinger, 2003). This cross-sectional study examined content of photos and a supplementary essay describing their identity. Examples of the content's categories were: religion, achievement, self with others, alcohol, creative, career, work, and nature. Results of the age difference were seen in religious depiction ($p < .01$) and working photos ($p < .001$). Middle age adults had more photos about "serious, meaning-making pursuits such as working, achievement, religion, and creativity" (Dollinger & Clancy Dollinger, 2003). Middle aged adults had richer (and less socially absorbed) autophotographies compared to that of younger adults. Age and more life experiences were implied to be factors in photographic richness. This is relevant to the present study which looks at much older adults, with rich and diverse life experiences. It might be expected that these older adults are even less socially absorbed and contain an overall more serious and meaningful autophotgraphies.

Present Study

This pilot study was designed to examine ego integrity in older adults (over the age of 55) through autophotography. Ego integrity was measured using Boylin's (1976) Ego Integrity Scale, which examines life satisfaction, regrets, achievements, and aging anxiety (see Appendix A).

Past studies have neglected to look at the richness of older adult's autophotography and how this relates to Erikson's developmental stages. Based on Dollinger and Clancy Dollinger (2003) it was expected that older adults would display a

richer self-expression (showing abstract ideas and feeling) of identity through autophotography. In accordance with Erikson's theory, it was expected that some older adults would display wisdom through life reflection and reminisce on lifetime accomplishments. Such pictures may show awards received, children, grandchildren, community involvement. Older adults in despair may show less reflection or signs of regrets within their autophotography. These pictures may show lack of involvement/inactivity, few relationships, or possibly a heavy obsession with the past (e.g. failed marriage).

Looking at an older population's ego integrity through the Ego Integrity Scale and their autophotographies, we have a new perspective of how those with ego integrity displayed their wisdom and reflected on life and how those with despair show bitterness for life. In addition, the effectiveness of this technique with older an older samples was examined.

Method

Participants

In this study 3 older Caucasian women participated with ages ranging from 72-88 (M =77.3, SD =9.23). The participants were recruited from senior citizen groups and emeritus in Southern Illinois.

Procedure

There were two meetings with each participant. The first meeting was to gather basic demographic, health, and social information. A research assistant explained the autophotography task. The autophotography procedure is the same that Dollinger and Clancy Dollinger (2003) used in past studies with a slight modification in that

participants could use old photos (See appendix B). The task is for participants to answer the broad question of "who are you?" with a collection of photos (about 27 exposures) using either past photos (new to this method) or taking new photos with a provided disposable camera. Old photos and the disposable camera were collected to be scanned and saved into the computer. Photos were then returned to the participant in the second meeting. During the second meeting, the participants completed the Ego Integrity Scale (See appendix A) and were allowed to explain why they choose those particular photos and how it answered the question "who are you?"

Results

Ego Integrity scores were strongly related to total interpersonal ($r = .99, p = .01$) photos and life continuity ($r = .998, p = .012$) themes and a high correlation with photos of people touching ($r = .99, p = .03$). Interpersonal themes were measured by tallying the number of photos containing people. As seen in Table 1, interpersonal had by far the highest number of photos than the other categories. This is not surprising that ego integrity scores and interpersonal themes were highly correlated because ego integrity is a stage in which it is important to have meaningful ties with family, friends, and the community. This also may explain the high correlation between ego integrity scores and photos with people touching. It is very likely that people will be touching if they have close ties to family and friends. Examples of these photos are of groups of people often huddled together smiling for the camera.

Table 1

Categories or Themes	Total Number of Photos	Average per person
Religion	9	3
Interpersonal	318	106
People touching	27	9
Reminiscing	22	7.33
Life continuity	16	5.33

Life continuity was measured by the display of the participant showing how even after they are gone, their work or their memory will survive. Examples of these types of photos included spending time with their grandchild, or their involvement in a project that they knew would out live themselves such as building a church. Life continuity also had a significant correlation with people touching ($r = .993, p = .007$). This is not surprising because life continuity is through how people will remember you after having passed away which shows meaningful relationships with person/s and often in these photos they were touching.

There were also significant relations between interpersonal and reminiscing ($r = .957, p = .043$) themes. Reminiscing was determined if the photos expressed the participant meditating over the past. Examples of reminiscent photos are a childhood house, wedding day, or childhood pictures. Although religion was a common theme in other studies (Kroger, 2002, Dollinger & Clancy Dollinger, 2003), few photos of religion were taken (see Table 1). This maybe be from the small number of participants, however it is something that should be investigated in future studies.

Discussion

It is important to state that this was a pilot study, to test the procedures of the autophotography methods and of an older age group and gain some understanding of

important themes. This is the first stage of the study and there will be further testing done on this age group. The main idea of this study was to understand how ego integrity was reflected through autophotographic methods. Main themes of the autophotographies were life continuity and interpersonal relationships which were both highly correlated to scores from ego integrity.

These themes are consistent to past findings (Sherman & Peak, 1991, Kroger, 2002, Dollinger & Clancy Dollinger, 2003). Sherman & Peak (1991) found patterns of self-assured, present problem solving, and existential/self-understanding, which relate well to present autophotography method in which participants revealed photos of achievement, and current leadership roles in the community and religious photos. Kroger focused on identity in older adults and found similar themes of creative work, defining commitments, philosophy of life/religion, perception of loss, leisure activities, and interpersonal relationships. Again these processes correspond well to the themes found in the autophotographies. Dollinger and Clancy (2003) used the autophotography method in college and middle aged adults found that older adults had more themes of religion, achievement, creativity, work, and had an overall richer and diverse autophotographies. These themes of achievement and religion were seen in the older adults in the present study.

Since this was a pilot study, there are many adjusts that should be made for future studies. First, both men and women should participate especially since Clancy & Dollinger (1993) found gender differences in college and middle aged adults. Second, it would be important to test a large group of participants from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status (SES). "Those who were least likely to have experienced

severe financial constraints regarding important identity decisions made earlier in their lives." (Kroger, 2002) Those who were financial stable for the majority of their life might have had more time and opportunities to develop their identity through gaining a higher education or having the chance to travel. Third, it would be valuable to include in the analysis recorded interviews with each participant. Some pictures may hold a deeper meaning which would be captured in a semi-structured interview. For example, one photo was of a bedroom, which holds little meaning until the participant reveals that she is very proud of her room now, because growing up as a twin, she never had a room to herself, nor was she ever able to completely decorate it the way she wanted. This explanation shows her importance to be an individual and her appreciation for having her own space. The second phase of this study will include analyzing the recorded interviews with each participant along with several measures such as the Rand Health Survey, Social Problem-Solving inventory, Social Provisions Scale.

Other improvements would be to clarify those categories and themes for each photo that demonstrated importance in this study. For example, religious items were represented in each participant's autophotography. Other categories, such as technology did not appear to be of importance or interest in their autophotographies. Other categories may even need to be added so as to become more specific. For example, interpersonal interactions, such as photos showing groups of people may be sub-categories as family, neighbors, community groups, or even church groups. It may be important to reveal close ties with family versus closer ties with the community.

Overall this study is the first phase of a large investigation into older adults and how they can express themselves through autophotographic methods. It is important to

investigate the autophotography method because it is a non-verbal, self-directed way of expression of identity. It allows for the participant to explain who they are without traditional methods of questionnaires or interviews.

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APPENDIX A

EGO INTEGRIY SCALE

1) I am satisfied with my life so far

2) I am willing to take responsibility for my decisions

3) I would not change my life if I lived it over

4) I am proud of what I have done

5) I accept myself the way I am

6) I worry about getting old

7) I regret the mistakes I've made

8) I am discontented with my life

9) Life is too short

10)I wish I could change myself

APPENDIX B

AUTOPHOTOGRAPHY CODING

____ - # of photos ____ - # indoor ____ - # old photos

Interpersonal
____Self alone --------- self smiling
____Self w/ others
____Others (no self) ----- others smiling
____No People

____People touching
____4 or more in Foreground
____People in Background

____Babies (0 – 5-ish)
____Kids (5 – 16)
____Young Adults (16 – 30)
____Adults (30 – 60)
____Older Adults (60 and above)

____Significant Other; opposite sex person (special)
____Sexual Identity Emphasis (e.g. self in special pose, bathing suit out of water)
____Young Photos of self

Possessions
____House or rooms in house (e.g. kitchen, living room, bedroom)
____Artwork, Books
____Pets, Animals
____Nick-nats/Souvenirs/Collections
____Cars/Transportations
____Computer/TV/Technology

Interests, Activities

____Religion (symbols, practicing)
____Dancing
____Cooking
____Eating/having eaten
____Talking/Playing Games
____Reading
____Sports/Exercise
____Outdoors/Gardening
____Music
____Work/Career (current or past)

Other themes
____Poverty/Deprivation/Hard life
____Time Perspective (past focus)
(future focus)
____Alcohol/Substance Abuse
____Boundaries/Privacy
____Telling a Story?
____Photos of Ancestors
____Reminiscing
____Life Continuity
____Traveling/Vacations