

Expanding the aging self: Investigating successful aging among Korean older adults using grounded theory*

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I. Introduction

The South Korean population aged 65 and older increased by more than 12.2% of Korean residents in 2013, while it was 7.2% in 2010 (Statistics Korea, 2014). This indicates that South Korea has rapidly changed and become an aged society, keeping pace with the rising global aging population. The marked aging of society, resulting from increased longevity, has recently highlighted the importance of what constitutes “successful” or “healthy” aging in South Korea (Oh, 2012). Emphasis on a growing aging society has noticeably altered our perspectives on aging and older adults (Hong & Ha, 2015; Kim & Kang, 2012; Willcox, Willcox, Sokolovsky, & Sakihara, 2007). Thus, aging also implies positive change and productive maturity beyond negative outcomes, such as physical, cognitive, and functional limitations (Reichstadt, Sengupta, Depp, Palinkas, & Jeste,

2010). Hence, the concept of positive aging focuses on healthy adaptation to aging, rather than the absence of functional decline (Bryant, Corbett, & Kutner, 2001). These trends have broadened the definition and understanding of successful or healthy aging (Reichstadt et al., 2010; Willcox et al., 2007).

Despite the concept’s introduction, there is a lack of general consensus on the definition of successful aging (Cosco, Prina, Perales, Stephan, & Brayne, 2014; Reichstadt et al., 2010). Successful aging is a multidimensional concept that goes beyond physical health and includes psychosocial and environmental components (Cosco et al., 2014). More specifically, psychosocial concepts such as autonomy, independence, active engagement, and self-awareness have been highlighted in successful aging (Cosco et al., 2014), based on their association with low risks of disorders, disabilities, and functional limitations (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). In addition,

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successful aging is regarded as a suitable consequence of adaptation to age-related changes (Chaves, Camozzato, Eizirik, & Kaye, 2009). During successful aging, older adults attempt to cope and adapt to a meaningful life by extending themselves beyond the boundaries of the sense of self (McCarthy & Bockweg, 2013; Schindler, Paech, & Löwenbrück, 2015). In a considerable amount of literature, successful aging is interchangeably used with healthy aging (Hansen-Kyle, 2005). The two concepts are similar, as they both incorporate the conceptualization of aging as a dynamic process, as opposed to static (Bryant et al., 2001; Hansen-Kyle, 2005). These concepts emphasize positive psychosocial adaptation, more so than physical health, in its improvement of quality of life among older adults (Cosco et al., 2014). However, successful aging is a more goal-oriented concept because it presumably refers to active strife towards a specific purpose in life: in a narrow sense, successful aging is an outcome of healthy aging (Hansen-Kyle, 2005; Troutman, Nies, & Mavellia, 2011). Therefore, successful aging, rather than healthy aging, is a more appropriate concept for representing the comprehensive and progressive aspect of the aging phenomenon experienced by older adults.

Previous research has played an important role in contributing towards a change in perceptions of successful aging. However, quantitative studies on factors contributing to successful aging (Chaves et al., 2009) have not explored the dynamic nature of the aging process (Reichstadt et al., 2010). Additionally, successful aging is relative, based on cultural norms and values (Willcox et al., 2007). The general conceptualizations and interpretations of successful aging, based on older adults' perspectives, may not be country- and

culture-specific (Hansen-Kyle, 2005; Thiamwong, McManus, & Suwanno, 2013). Korean older adults' experiences and perspectives also affect their own interpretation of the meaningfulness of successful aging (Paik, 2008). Taking this into account, studies using universal concepts of successful aging have not adequately reflected the Korean socio-cultural context. As a result, culturally relevant information about the significance and process of Korean older adults' successful aging is limited.

Understanding older adults' perspectives regarding successful aging forms an integral part of the creation of nursing interventions aimed at improving quality of life. Understanding the process of successful aging also guides nurses on how to age well and on the development of further interventions for promoting physical and psychosocial health (Reichstadt et al., 2010). This understanding, built using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory, could highlight the dynamic process of successful aging.

This study aimed to understand the meaning and process of Korean older adults' successful aging and to develop a substantive theory, taking into account the Korean socio-cultural context. Understanding the process of successful aging from Korean older adults' perspectives can provide data towards the development of contextually appropriate nursing interventions for facilitating successful aging.

II. Methods

1. Study design

Grounded theory is a methodology with which to explore and theorize social processes by examining intrapersonal, interpersonal, and

self-environment relationships and interactions. The research methodology is influenced by symbolic interactionism, a predominant philosophical framework. Thus, grounded theory is an appropriate methodology to understand Korean older adults' successful aging behavior, interactions, and social processes within the Korean cultural context.

2. Setting and participants eligibility

Purposive and theoretical sampling was employed to select 14 participants from a public health center and a volunteer institution in Gyeonggi Province, South Korea. Initially, five participants who were more likely to provide data regarding Korean older adults' successful aging were recruited based on Rowe and Kahn's (1997) successful aging characteristics. Inclusion criteria were 1) being aged at least 65 years, 2) being a volunteer for or participant in social activities, and 3) having a moderate to high physical activity level. The researcher personally contacted five participants who actively and regularly participate in volunteer activities, based on the recommendations of the director of public health center and the volunteer center. As analysis progressed, theoretical sampling through the snowball method was used to select nine additional participants who provided further in-depth information that could enable the recognition of strategies and stages of the process. Theoretical sampling is a pivotal strategy that identifies the range and variation in a category, using the constant comparative analysis approach to guide the emerging theory.

3. Ethical considerations

Before the study commenced, approval for

human rights-related research procedures was obtained from the research committee of the nursing school. The directors of the public health center and the volunteer center agreed to their centers' participation. We provided a comprehensive, written explanation of the procedures to those willing to participate. The procedure was explained in writing to each willing, potential participant. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and were notified that they could withdraw any time. Contact information was provided, so participants could ask questions, if necessary. Each participant voluntarily provided written informed consent before the interview.

4. Data collection

Data were collected between February 2006 and December 2010. In-depth interviews were performed, with semi-structured and open-ended questions. Interviews were performed by the researcher, who passed a qualitative research methodology course in a doctoral program and participated in a qualitative research conference. Interview plans, including the date, time, and place, were scheduled by considering convenience for participants. Each interview was audio-recorded in participants' homes, volunteer workplaces, or at the researcher's office, based on each participant's preference. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the author, and lasted 60-90 minutes. Memos and field notes were documented for additional data. Interviews were conducted to the point of theoretical saturation, described as the point at which no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge in category development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The initial interview questions focused on

Korean older adults' insights about successful aging and included, "What thoughts do you have about your life?", "What do you think results in successful aging?", "What does successful aging mean to you?", and "Can you describe the process of successful aging in a word?". The interview questions were revised during data collection to reflect the emerging themes and theorization of Korean older adults' successful aging experiences. Additional interview questions (Table 1) were developed through theoretical sampling and were expected to increasingly capture the aging self-process, an emerging theme.

5. Data analysis

Data analysis was manually conducted, using open, axial, and selective coding with constant comparative analysis, which involves simultaneous comparison across data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, through repeated line-by-line reading so as to sensitively identify meaningful concepts, similar concepts were grouped into larger categories in open coding (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). For example, the concepts, "avoid overworking in daily life", and "careful about one's health" were grouped into a category labeled "advancing to a healthy lifestyle". Based on categories derived from the

data, subsequent interview questions were developed, such as, "What thoughts do you have about advancing a healthy lifestyle as you get older?". Second, during axial coding, connections among categories were identified through the coding paradigm, as follows: the condition of the phenomenon, actions or interaction of the people in the situation, and consequences of actions and interactions. The category, advancing to a healthy lifestyle, was classified under "developing the valuable self" because it explained one part of Korean older adults' health-promotion strategies. To clarify categories, subsequent interview questions were developed, such as "What do you do to develop yourself in life as you age?". Finally, through selective coding, all categories were refined and integrated into a central category, "expanding the aging self". At each coding process, the concepts and categories that emerged were defined through a discussion and consultation with one nursing professor and one nursing doctoral student with qualitative research experiences.

The trustworthiness of this study was established by meeting all four criteria: credibility, fittingness, auditability, and confirmability, and was supported using member check, field notes, memos, and audit trails. In relation to member check, seven participants stated that the

Table 1. Interview Questions.

Type	Questions
Initial	What thoughts do you have about your life?
	What do you think results in successful ageing?
	What does successful ageing mean to you?
	Can you describe the process of successful ageing in a word?
Developed	What thoughts do you have about advancing a healthy lifestyle as you get older?
	What strategies do you use to manage your life?
	What do you do to develop yourself in life as you age?
	What strategies do you use to cope with changes?

results represented their experiences. Interviews were processed by systematic schedules and nonverbal interactions were recorded as field notes. Throughout data analysis, theoretical memos were documented, representing the researcher's conceptual speculations (Draucker et al., 2007).

III. Results

1. Participant demographic characteristics

Participants' ages ranged from 66 to 82 years; nine were women and five were men (Table 2). All participants were engaged as social volunteers in their communities and did not have problems with activities of daily living. Eight participants had health problems such as mild chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, osteoarthritis, and diabetes mellitus. Of the eight participants living with their spouses, three lived with their

children's families, and one lived with a geriatric mother-in-law. Bereaved participants lived either alone (n=4) or with their children's families (n=1). Participants' education levels varied as follows: elementary school (n=5), middle school (n=3), high school (n=2), college (n=3), and no formal education (n=1).

The central category, as a basic social process derived from this study's data, was termed "expanding the aging self" (Figure 1). This process involved three sub-processes of "adjusting to the changes", "developing the valuable self", and "embracing the environment".

2. Causal conditions: changes

A principal motivation for successful aging was acknowledging the changes in one's situation - physical, mental, or psychosocial - such as weakening muscular strength, impaired vision and hearing, declining memory, and retirement:

Table 2. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Informants	Age (Gender)	Education level	Residence with	Health problems
Participant 1	76 (M)	College	Wife	None
Participant 2	66 (F)	High school	Husband	Glaucoma, COPD
Participant 3	68 (F)	College	Husband, mother-in-law	None
Participant 4	81 (F)	Elementary school	Husband, son's family	Osteoarthritis
Participant 5	78 (F)	Middle school	Alone after bereavement	Hypertension, cardiac valve disorder
Participant 6	72 (F)	High school	Alone after separation	None
Participant 7	66 (F)	Elementary school	Husband, son's family	None
Participant 8	76 (M)	None	Wife	Hypertension, diabetes mellitus
Participant 9	78 (M)	Elementary school	Wife, unmarried son	Prostate cancer
Participant 10	77 (M)	Elementary school	Son's family after bereavement	Gastric cancer surgery
Participant 11	72 (F)	Middle school	Alone after bereavement	None
Participant 12	82 (F)	Elementary school	Alone after bereavement	Hypertension
Participant 13	75 (F)	Middle school	Alone after bereavement	Hypertension
Participant 14	75 (M)	College	Wife	None

Note. COPD = chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

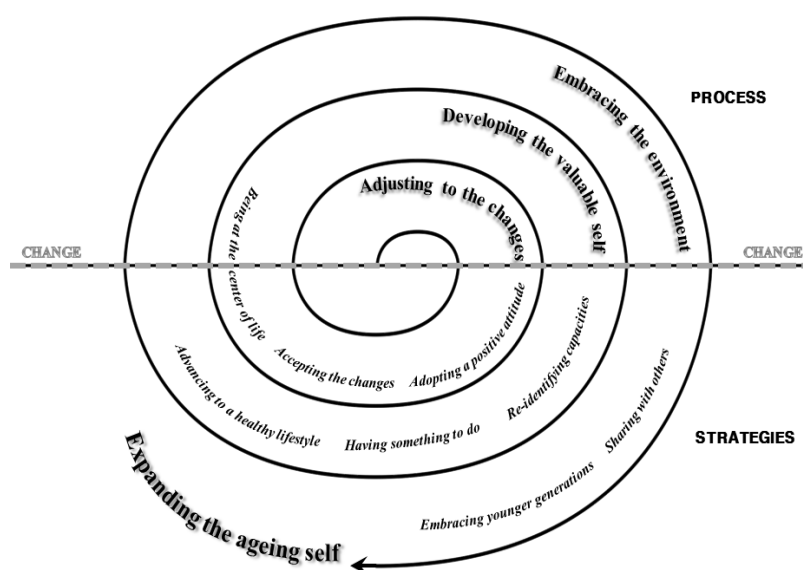


Figure 1. Process of Successful Ageing among Korean Older Adults.

I am a good driver and I have never had trouble reversing, but one day I just couldn't do it. I thought it was just a one-time incident, but no, I just couldn't do it anymore. I then knew I was getting old and there was nothing I could do. (Participant 6)

Additionally, in South Korea, socio-cultural changes have led to elderly individuals no longer expecting full support from their children, unlike their parents' generation. Participants also noted that previously held attitudes of absolute respect for elderly individuals has changed. This Korean geriatric generation has undergone a period of social turbulence: they were born during the Japanese Occupation, experienced the Korean War as youth, and were exposed to rapid industrialization in middle age. Family responsibility was most important during those unsettled times. Moreover, since Confucian perspectives on fundamental life emphasized family, this

generation also supported their parents. However, they realized that supporting elderly parents – previously perceived as a natural family responsibility – was not perceived as an ideal by younger generations. In particular, participants believed that the social atmosphere had shifted from the traditional values of respect for the elderly due to the sharp increase in the geriatric population:

I went to elementary school when Korea was under Japanese control. Then, the Korean War broke out. The chaos at that time cannot be imagined or described now. I would skip meals to save money for my children's education. I thought that supporting one's own parents was obligatory, according to Confucianism. But look how much it has changed now! It's an old story. It's all different now. (Participant 1)

3. Basic social process: expanding the aging self

Based on a changing environment, the basic social process - *expanding the aging self* - was defined as improving potential efficacy by creating close relationships and including the other in the self. Participants utilized the process to fully recover and expand their intrinsic and extrinsic values within this changing environment. Participant 6 described it as follows: *"As an elderly individual, I try discovering my new roles, particularly in contributing to society, by broadening my mind and understanding the current social atmosphere of the younger generation ... eventually, such a life is fruitful and enjoyable"*. Thus, expanding the aging self involved adjusting to the changes, developing the valuable self, and embracing the environment.

4. Adjusting to the changes

Adjusting to the changes was an important, initial self-expansion process, as it dealt with various aging-related physiological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes. Adjusting to the changes involved "adopting a positive attitude", "accepting the changes", and "being at the center of life". Perceiving aging-related changes realistically played a crucial role in facilitating the participants' acceptance. Those who attributed such changes to their environment or perceived them as momentary incidents were unable to accept the changes.

Although the environment had changed, participants reoriented themselves to their surroundings to suit their needs, by adopting a positive attitude towards aging changes. Accepting the changes was a strategy by which participants realistically perceived changes, such as weakened abilities, as part of the natural aging process. This helped older adults

compensate for these impairments and prepare for successful aging. On the other hand, failure to accept changes caused negative emotions such as withdrawal, depression, or worthlessness, which may have hindered sufficient adjustment. Participant 1 stated, *"You may feel depressed when you try to deny something or refuse to accept. It is not the right time to resist. It is foolish to cry out loud; I could not accept reality. I would rather accept it and naturally adjust to it. It is nothing more than an admission of the truth. When I see where I am and accept it, I experience no inner conflict"*.

Being at the center of life was another way of adjusting to the changes. Participants redirected their goals from being centered on their spouses or children, to themselves. This was a major strategy among Korean older adults in their initiation of successful aging. By attending less to their family members or jobs and focusing more on themselves, participants were able to recover their values and expand themselves, instead of feeling a great sense of loss:

After the Liberation, I married young, in order to avoid enlistment for the Korean War. Since then, I have lived for my family. I did not think of myself, but only my family. Now I am free; no burdens, just freedom. I then started to think of things I should do for myself. (Participant 4)

5. Developing the valuable self

Participants also expanded themselves to live in accordance with their changing environment. In particular, they allocated time for themselves, prioritized ways to maintain good health, and actively adjusted their lifestyles according to the following three strategies: "re-identifying capacities", "having something to

do”, and “advancing to a healthy lifestyle”.

Re-identifying capacities was fundamental for overcoming age-related changes and aging successfully. On the other hand, those who did not use these existing and/or potential abilities could show regressive traits. By acquiring new knowledge or utilizing their strengths, participants developed their potential capacity for continuous learning beyond mere curiosity or desire, even in late adulthood. Having something to do gave participants a new purpose and redirected their energy. Additionally, it positively influenced them to create new opportunities in their lives. This strategy was established to ensure that participants could be occupied on a regular basis, suggesting that successful aging was an ongoing process, reflected in a participant’s insight. Activities for older people were not typically associated with productivity; instead, they had a symbolic meaning and maintained the participants’ quality of life by providing regularity at later stages in life:

Having something to do, although it does not really give me much (money or other economic benefits), is related more to service or study, and is enjoyable. Having a purpose is energizing. The days I have to go out, I wash my hair. I do not want to look shabby. I don’t care about my hair when I don’t go out. This shows how lethargic I am when I don’t have a purpose. (Participant 4)

Advancing to a healthy lifestyle was the basis for leading a vibrant life, in that it contributed to the participant’s very existence. Mental and physical health played a central role in the participants’ recognition of the value of life. Participants not only focused on maintaining their current health status, but also actively engaged in health management with vigilance for even minute symptoms. This

approach to health facilitated successful aging. Participants not only sought hospital care for medical relief, but also made health-oriented lifestyle changes, such as eating healthy food and using traditional practices. Participant 6 stated, “The food that I eat is medicine”, implying that the participants chose healthy food and had regular meal timings and diets.

I habitually do not drink anything unhealthy. My body cannot take it. That’s why I turn myself away from it. I didn’t know it when I was young. When my joints start to get sour, I know it means I lack calcium. So, I eat dried fish, black beans, safflower seeds, and so on. I make up for what I am lacking. It keeps me fit and it requires my effort. (Participant 6)

In addition, the participants modified their lifestyles, making them more flexible. This was not easy, particularly because lifestyles were influenced by cultural and societal values, internalized through socialization over one’s lifespan. Participant 5 provided an explanation, “Old people are used to inviting guests home and giving them a treat. We think it is irresponsible or even rude to bring guests to restaurants. But making food and washing dishes seem to be too much work. So, we discarded the old way of thinking and started to order food. It is better than falling sick myself”. Participants learned to give importance to themselves as they aged. This strategy helped them become less stubborn, correct old habits, and manage the changing environment.

6. Embracing the environment

The process of recovering and obtaining intrinsic values led them to seek extrinsic values, further encouraged by expanding their previously narrow relationship with the

environment. In particular, the recovery of interpersonal relationships gave participants existential meaning, referred to as integrative value. Participants embraced the environment by “sharing with others” and “embracing younger generations”.

Participants chose to develop new relationships with other older persons, rather than maintain weakened relationships associated with aging. They shared a similar appreciation of life with others congregating at community health centers, elderly welfare centers, and schools for older adults. By sharing with others within new relations, they expanded their interpersonal selves as members of a society for older people. Participants deployed this strategy to invest their time and money in social activities, as socializing gave them intrinsic joy by enabling them to interpersonal relationships. Participants were able to socialize at voluntary service centers. This was consistent with their values, which were crucial to the process of integration through self-expansion. It was also noteworthy that they attempted to share, regardless of their financial position. Moreover, all participants believed that satisfaction came from sharing:

It was important for me to live for my family; but, as I got older, I wanted to do something good for other people. I may not be of much help, but I wanted to share the most I could. As an old person, I may not be very productive for society, but merely being able to do something for others makes me happy. When I began, elderly people in the service were few, but now there are many. I think this is an area where we could contribute to society. (Participant 12)

Participants suggested that respecting older adults and helping parents – previously practiced Korean customs based on Confucian

teaching – no longer held true, stating that mutual respect was required, for them to engage with younger individuals. One participant said, *“In the olden days, we had to be very good to our parents, but now, we have to be very good to our children. I mean, we need to think of mutual kindness and respect. One-sided respect does not work anymore.” (Participant 1)*

In order to embrace others, a strategy of first showing respect, instead of waiting for respect, was required. Participants were aware of this social atmosphere and tried to understand the younger generation’s perspective, demonstrating respect, expecting this to ensure amicable and mutually respectful relationships. This ultimately advanced their embrace for younger generations at self-expansion, resulting in positive experiences.

IV. Discussion

This study attempted to understand the process of successful aging, as experienced by older adults in South Korea. One of the most important findings was the self-expansion established through mutually respectful relationships with families and society, wherein participants attempted to understand themselves and the perspectives of others.

As a basic social process, expanding the aging self was identified in the present study. In many previous studies, the broadening of personal boundaries has been suggested as one of the processes of successful aging (Haugan & Innstrand, 2012). The embracing stage, which involves engagement in mutually respectful relationships as a strategy, was identified as a core pathway to self-expansion in previous research (Schindler et al., 2015). This finding

may be related to the traditional collectivism-oriented context. Older Asian adults are culturally distinct from those in a Western society, which tends to emphasize personal contemplation and individualism (Fry et al., 2009).

Korean older adults' adjustment to the changes, as the first stage of successful aging, was a noteworthy result. Through strategies involving the maintenance of positive perspectives and attitude towards physical, psychosocial, and emotional changes, internal awareness and acceptance of aging-related changes had a positive influence on successful aging (Diehl et al., 2014). It is believed that the attempt to emphasize positive aspects and neglect negative ones is so as to enable the process of cognitive reconstruction, which selects or neglects specific areas in selective optimization compensation (SOC) (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996), which accompanies the rewards associated with elderly Korean people's revision of the goals of living, who are in pursuit of successful aging through the process of adjustment. Therefore, it is necessary for successful aging to encourage attempts to maintain a positive outlook regarding the change in circumstances. Especially, shifting from a family-centered life to a self-centered life is a requisite process to adjustment to the changes in the life transition process of Korean older adults, as they had previously devoted their lives to their families in the Confucian and patriarchal traditional cultural context (Eom, 2002).

Developing the valuable self was another essential process of successful aging identified in this study, which is consistent with previous research (Cosco et al., 2014; Lee & Moon, 2012; Reichstadt et al., 2010). It is necessary for older adults to try and identify their

capacities and to engage in regular and purposeful activities (Troutman et al., 2011), as these strategies can provide the dynamic power that influences feelings of control over the physical and emotional self (Reichstadt et al., 2010). Moreover, with regard to the prevention of aging-related vulnerability, pursuing healthy habits contributed towards the maintenance of good health and augmentation of self-confidence, thereby promoting successful aging (Hörder, Frändin, & Larsson, 2013). In particular, participating in and doing anything is suggested as the most important phenomenon for explaining the behavior of healthy aging for elderly people (Bryant et al., 2001; Hansen-Kyle, 2005). Thus, this focus on involvement in activities might provide regular opportunities to promote the valuable self, such as the utilization of health management centers or health education and information. These self-care nursing strategies, which aid health promotion, could prevent the prevalence of elderly frailty accompanied by chronic disease; in turn, this would ensure quality of life among older adults.

The final process, embracing the environment, which includes family, the next generation, and Korean society, was a vital phase for Korean older adults. In the process of interacting with the environment, older adults could mature in later life and maintain their relational network and social value through re-socialization (Willcox et al., 2007). In particular, participation in volunteer work is remarkable, as this is rarely observed among Korean older adults living in a family-centered sociocultural context, traditional Confucianism, and the historical context of war (Eom, 2002). Through this strategy, which was characterized by interacting with others and helping them, Korean older

adults could continue building connections with society and reinforcing social networks. In addition, volunteering could rebuild one's sense of value and life purpose, which contribute to personal growth and, in turn, facilitate feelings of worth relating to self-expansion (McNamara & Gonzales, 2011). Effort was required to understand and recognize Korean older adults' opinions regarding their relations with the next generation. The volunteering strategy might set up a favorable and reciprocal respectful environment, thus contributing to enhancement and enrichment of the aging self-concept (Oxtoby, 2014). In particular, because Korean older adults appreciate their value and roles, as a function of family and social relationships, it is important for them to adjust and pursue respectful relations (Gong, 2010; Paik, 2008). The results of the age project show that such a cultural characteristic of successful aging can be found among older people in the Oriental region of Hong Kong and is culturally differentiated from the characteristic of those in the United States, which places emphasis on personal independence and individual properties (Fry et al., 2009). Older people who have grown up with the Confucian values put significant emphasis on relationships with their families, the harmony of family relationships can be an important strategy in the process of successful aging (Torres, 2006). Therefore, nurses could support self-expansion by providing interventions that establish positive, reciprocal relationships (Iacono, 2014). As a result, because relationships with others are an important strategy for Korean older adults' successful aging process, continuous meaningful relationships are necessary. Korean older adults could be provided with useful information regarding public health centers or volunteer

institutes, as well as activities in these contexts. As healthcare providers, nurses could help older adults develop effective communication skills or interpersonal relationships. In addition, based on the understanding facilitated by the current study's results, nurses could contribute towards the establishment of supportive policies relating to relationship education programs for older adults.

There are some limitations to consider for future research. First, our findings could not identify the relation between the spirituality domain and changes in the successful aging process. Therefore, to enable the generalizability of results from qualitative research, further studies should be carried out in different cultures or contexts, where older adults are aging successfully, but are possibly experiencing the process differently from those in the current study. In addition, the historicity of participants born during the late 1920s through early 1940s may have contributed to contextual findings. Future studies should make cross-generational comparisons, to understand the aging process of the next generation living in a culture that has undergone changes.

V. Conclusion

This study's findings demonstrate that the basic social process characterizing Korean older adults is expanding the aging self. Korea older adults' aging self expands through the process of adjusting, developing, and embracing in the changing environments. Understanding the experience of Korean older adults' successful aging may help nurses consider the importance of not only the physical health, but also the psychosocial health of older adults' healthcare in a family and community health nursing

approach. In addition, during the dynamic period of socio-cultural change accompanying a rapidly growing aging population, this finding could guide research and program development about self-care management and the interpersonal relationship in a meaningful and practical way, contributing towards older adults' quality of life. Moreover, through these results, nursing education programs for older adults could provide health promotion strategies from older adults' inter-relational viewpoint.

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ABSTRACT

Expanding the Aging Self: Successful Aging among Korean Older Adults using Grounded Theory*

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Purpose: This qualitative study aimed to understand older adults' perspectives on successful aging and develop a model of a successful aging process, within the Korean socio-cultural context. **Methods:** This study used a Grounded Theory approach. Through theoretical sampling, 14 participants were selected from older adults at a public health center and a volunteer institution in Gyeonggi Province, South Korea. **Results:** The basic social process identified was "expanding the aging self", which was preceded by three phases, namely, adjusting to the changes, developing the valuable self, and embracing the environment. Participants used 2-3 strategies for successful aging in each phase. For adjusting to the changes, participants used strategies such as "adopting a positive attitude", "accepting the changes", and "being at the center of life". To develop the valuable self, "re-identifying capacities", "having something to do", and "advancing to a healthy lifestyle" were used. Participants embraced their environments with "sharing with others" and "embracing younger generations". The causal condition for expanding the aging self was the changes in participants' physical, mental, or psychosocial situations. **Conclusion:** These findings suggest a theoretical foundation for the development of potential nursing interventions to promote self-care management and the interpersonal relationship for successful aging among Korean elderly individuals.

Key words : Aging, Aged, Qualitative research, Grounded theory

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