Spiritual Meaning Making in the Lives of Older Adults

Harriet L. Cohen, PhD, LCSW, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX

The purpose of this research was to examine how older adults make meaning of the spiritual turning points in their lives. Twenty-four African American and Jewish older adults were recruited from a synagogue and a neighborhood center serving older African Americans and interviewed in separate ethnic groups. Participants were asked to complete a form and participate in a focus group identifying their spiritual turning points and the impact of those events on their lives at the time they occurred and now. Focus groups methodology was selected because of their low cost, high validity, and successful results with cultural groups. Findings reveal that spiritual meaning making for older adults involves four dimensions: personal, interpersonal, sociocultural and structural. Meaning making for these older adults may involve attributing an old meaning to a new situation or reinterpreting an old experience from a new understanding. This narrative gerontology approach provided a framework for these ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse older adults to explore how these critical, spiritual events contributed to life’s meaning. Their stories illustrate how older adults learn and grow from the events in their lives and how they utilize spiritual meaning making to increase their adaptive capacity. (195 words)

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1 = Title of presentation submission
2 = Name and affiliation of the author(s)
3 = First sentence – purpose
4 = Next 1-2 sentences – method
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6 = Last sentence – conclusion