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THE POSITIVE AGING NEWSLETTER

January/February/March 2018

Issue 104

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The Positive Aging Newsletter by Mary and Kenneth Gergen
Sponsored by the Taos Institute (www.taosinstitute.net)

"THE BEST IN...INSIGHTS IN AGING"
Wall Street Journal

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*****Commentary: Life Purpose: Seizing the Days**

One problem many confront when they retire is the loss of purpose. The workplace is no longer demanding one's attention and the nest is empty. Most of the challenges of earlier life - schooling, finding work, finding a partner, and the like - are no longer present. Nor does it seem very nourishing to live out the remaining years just resting and relaxing. So then what? This is no small question, as our lives are held together largely in webs of meaning. Together people generate ideas about what is important or valuable to do - both from day to day and across time. It is important to "win a game" for example, because we have come to agree that it is. Take away the agreement, and who cares? So, moving through and beyond retirement, we may find ourselves heading toward the cliff of "who cares?"

In our last Newsletter we reported on research that is worth revisiting. The research reported that having a purpose in life is literally life giving. In a study of more than 6,000 people, researchers found those with greater purpose were 15 percent less likely to die (over a 14 year period) than those without aims. Those with purpose also slept better, had fewer strokes and heart attacks, lower risk of dementia, and less risk of disability.

There are many reasons for these life advantages. People who have purpose are more likely to be active, thus contributing to fitness. Having a purpose is also associated with being optimistic, and as we have reported in previous issues of the Newsletter, optimism is also a life-giver. Research also shows that those with a strong sense of purpose are also more likely to embrace preventive health services, such as mammograms, colonoscopies and flu shots.

On the positive side, many people find that aging opens a wonderful door to new possibilities. There are all those hobbies, skills, and curiosities - wood working, fishing, painting, gardening, designing, and so on - that had to be put on hold during the demand period of the middle years, now waiting to be rekindled. And there are long-held dreams that can now be made into realities - learning to play an instrument, earning a degree, writing a book, building a house, and so on. We have written

much in previous issues about the great benefits that come from voluntary work - in schools, churches, hospitals, and the like. We recently learned of a program run by Experience Corps, an organization that trains older adults to tutor children in urban public schools. Research showed marked improvements in mental and physical health among the volunteers. They also experienced higher self-esteem, and acquired better mobility and stamina. (The children also benefitted.) We are particularly strong advocates of activities in which others participate. As we believe, these webs of meaning making are precious and powerful.

Ken and Mary Gergen

From: Finding purpose for a good life, also a healthy one by Dhruv Khullar, NYTimes, Jan. 1, 2018, online.

*****RESEARCH*****

*** Happily Ever After: Emotions in Old Age**

The stereotypes of aging as a time of regret, loss, and longing are one-sided and need to be challenged. Continuing evidence reveals that emotional well-being improves from early adulthood to old age. The present study adds significant new turn: More positive emotions are life-giving.

The research is based on a sample of 184 men and women spanning early to very late adulthood, and was conducted for more than a ten year period. The sample, carefully chosen to represent each generation, wore monitors for one week. At five random intervals during each day, participants reported their emotional states. This procedure was repeated five and then ten years later. Participants rated the degree to which they were feeling each of 19 emotions. The list of emotions included 8 positive (happiness, joy, contentment, excitement, pride, accomplishment, interest, and amusement) and 11 negative emotions (anger, sadness, fear, disgust, guilt, embarrassment, shame, anxiety, irritation, frustration, and boredom).

As the results showed, with greater age there is higher overall emotional well-being and greater emotional stability. These findings remained robust regardless of differences in gender, ethnicity, and physical

health. Contrary to the popular view that youth is “the best time in life,” the present findings suggest that the peak of emotional life may not occur until well into the 7th decade.

Of great interest is also the fact that emotional well-being is related to longevity. Controlling for age, sex, and ethnicity, individuals who experienced more positive than negative emotions in everyday life were more likely to survive over a 14 year period. This does not mean that if you are unhappy now that your life will be shortened. Happiness so often depends on joining in social life, and remaining active. These are daily choices.

From: Laura L. Carstensen, Bulent Turan, Susanne Scheibe, Nilam Ram, Hal Ersner-Hershfield, Gregory R. Samanez-Larkin, Kathryn P. Brooks, and John R. Nesselrode Emotional Experience Improves With Age: Evidence Based on Over 10 Years of Experience Sampling. *Psychology and Aging*, 2011, 26, 21- 33.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0021285>

*** Eat Your Veggies (Especially Salads)**

We all know that a healthy diet is essential to living to a ripe old age. We also understand that vegetables are good for us. The present study adds a new and important finding. Scientists at the Rush University Medical Center in Chicago monitored the diet of 960 elderly people. The volunteers were in their early 80s and received a regular “food frequency questionnaire” between 2004 and 2013. Their cognitive functioning was also measured. Most interesting, the results showed that participants who ate one serving of leafy vegetables a day performed better in cognitive tests than their peers who ate no salad at all. While the young were generally better in test scores than the elderly, the gap between salad eaters and non-eaters widened over the years. By the last assessment, those who were salad eaters had an 11 year edge in cognitive ability on those who didn't include them in their diet. The difference was found regardless of other factors such as education, exercise, alcohol use, age, gender, smoking, or the use of brain games.

From: Kale and other leafy vegetables may make your brain 11 year younger by Melissa Healy, *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 20, 2017, on line.

***** IN THE NEWS *****

*** Joyful Connections: A Dose of Happiness for Dementia**

Joyful Connections is a program that helps people with dementia stay socially connected, active, and involved with others through the arts. The first program was conducted through the Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly in Brighton, Mass. The program takes place in the late afternoon, five days a week, same time, same place, which makes it easy to remember. The late afternoon seems to be a time of day when the symptoms of dementia are worse; it is a syndrome called “sundowning.” (Sounds like daily life to us; we take a tea!). Each session lasts about two hours, during which people exercise, share refreshments, and engage in an activity often related to art or music. It is all part of the Habilitation Therapy Model developed by Paul Raia.

This community housing center is one of six in the Boston area, where people who have very little money can live. Currently more than 900 people between 62 and 104 live in these apartments. They are comfortable and secure, and “they can go about living a life with purpose and meaning,” said Caren Silverlieb, an executive with the program. The majority of the residents speak Russian; some speak Chinese, and some English.

In terms of physical exercise, participants may imagine they are going fishing, and they act as though they are fishing. Others may pretend to play volleyball or beach games. Each activity is designed to promote social connections, inspire creativity, improve mood and cultivate a sense of purpose. Residents also do art projects, engage in dance, and play music or sing. One of the most popular programs is a slide show about travel. The participants love the photos and often recall their own travels. By all indications, the program brings great happiness to the participants. As one said, she had lived there almost 30 years, and was happier now than she had ever been because of Joyful Connections.

There are written guides that can be used to help others who might wish to start a Joyful Connections program in their areas. To download guides, go to www.jche.org/guide

From: Joy and connection: Cornerstones of a dementia program that elevates mood and self-esteem, *Aging Today*, Nov-Dec. 2017, pg. 1, 14.

***Working Out at Age 101**

Every day, it seems, we learn of another outstanding oldster, who is doing incredible things... incredible even from someone much younger. It is both inspiring, and simultaneously daunting for us lesser mortals. For example, last week a 94 year old pianist who had to be helped on and off the stage of the famed Kimmel Center Orchestra Hall in Philadelphia, played his regular performance with the orchestra, and then had three encores! Today we learned the story of Yehuda Hammer, born in 1916, who is still working out 30 minutes a day on an exercise machine. Now living in a retirement community, where he moved at 96, his trainer says he has the muscle strength of a 40 year old. Hammer claims never to be sick, and that life's adversities have made him stronger. He was born in Poland, survived the Holocaust, and was imprisoned in Stalin's Russia. A Zionist at 17, he moved to Israel in 1947 and participated in the refugee resettlement that was featured in the book and movie *Exodus*. He immigrated to the United States in 1960, and worked as a tailor. One of his secrets is to exercise and stretch before getting out of bed in the morning. That is something we can all do.

From: Still workout out at age 101 by Kevin Riodan. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 13, 2018, B1, B3.

***** BOOK REVIEW*****

* *Love Your Age: The Small-Step Solution to a Better, Longer, Happier Life*, By Barbara H. Grufferman.

We may dream of taking great strides toward self-betterment, but rarely do we succeed. A better approach is the one offered in this book: Take 100 little steps, to a longer, happier and healthier life. These little steps offer a new approach to creating the habits that will rejuvenate your coming years.

Overall, loyal readers of self-care articles in women's magazines will find this book reviewing many of the mantras we have recited in the last few years about healthy living – exercise, diet, sleep, etc. The little steps are familiar to us all. It is still necessary to follow through, and do them. There doesn't seem to be a magic little hop that lets us step up without some effort. Darn!

To order go to www.aarp.org/LoveYourAge

***** Podcast:**

Aging in the 21st Century Workforce: The Work Motivation of Mature Workers. Tuesday, April 24th at 12:00 noon EDT (9:00 PDT and 11 CT). The 4th Tuesday Revolutionize Retirement Interview with Expert's series will feature Dr. Gillian Leithman, Ph.D. Dr. Gill is Assistant Professor in the Department of Management at the John Molson School of Business, Founder of "Rewire to Retire," and Co-founder of CPRC 2.0. The interview is accessible via phone or Internet, and questions can only be asked via the Internet. Sign up will begin by April 17th at www.revolutionizeretirement.com. Address questions to Dori Mintzer (dorian@dorianmintzer.com)

*****READERS RESPOND**

* Alice Updike Scannell responds:

Greetings Ken, Mary, and staff of the Taos Institute, I'm Alice Updike Scannell, PhD, a faithful reader of the Taos Institute's Positive Aging Newsletter. I'm also a gerontologist and educator who is dedicated to approaching life and the aging process from a positive perspective. I published a book in December titled *Radical Resilience*:

When There's No Going Back to the Way Things Were. In it I show how we can work through life-changing challenges or adversities and live into our new normal without losing our sense of self. I think that you and the readers of *The Positive Aging Newsletter* would find it a helpful support for living positively through later life.

You can browse through *Radical Resilience: When There's No Going Back to the Way Things Were* on Amazon. There are several reviews there as well as a short author bio.

Many thanks,
auscannell@aol.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS

*A New Open Access Journal

* *Innovation In Aging*. Oxford University Press. Academic.oup.com/innovateage

MEETINGS

*July 30 – August 3 Educational Gerontology: Optimizing Learning for Older Adults. A Summer Institute offered at the University of British Columbia

This program will be a discovery of how to use the Arts and Transformative Learning theory to optimize the older adult (50+) learning experience, increasing the quality of life and overall wellbeing for the largest and fastest growing demographic in our population.

Deadline to register: June 15 **Cost:** \$600

Questions about the program can be addressed to the Senior Program Assistant, Susan Currie at pro-d.educ@ubc.ca or Robert Wilson robgw44@hotmail.com

*Nov. 14-18, 2018 Gerontological Society of America Annual Scientific

Meeting. Boston. Abstract submissions open. Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Keynote Speaker. geron.org

*****WEBSITE*****

* passitonnetwork.org/ PASS IT ON is a global exchange network promoting positive aging.

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***** Information for Readers *****

We hope that you enjoy The Positive Aging Newsletter.

- Questions & Feedback

If you have any questions, or material you'd like to share with other newsletter readers, please e-mail Mary Gergen at - gv4@psu.edu

- Past issues

Past issues of the newsletter, including our translated issues in Spanish, German, French, Portuguese, Danish, and Chinese are archived at: www.positiveaging.net

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