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Health and Functioning in Later Life

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Section A

Is “Late Life Development” an Oxymoron?
Defining Old Age

- What makes a person “old” in your native culture?
Defining Old Age

- What makes “old” adults different from “non-old” adults?

- Potential criteria
  - Chronological age
  - Social roles (kids grown, grandparent, retired, not actively working)
  - Physical appearance
  - Health status
  - Ability to function independently
  - Cumulative life experience
In the U.S. and in other nations, “old age” is defined by age of eligibility for national pensions (e.g., Social Security in the U.S.).

Demographers define three groups:
- Young-old: ages 65-74
- Old-old: ages 75-84
- Oldest old: ages 85+
Old Age and Aging Have an Image Problem

- Negative public perceptions of older adults (ageism)
  - Stereotypes that most older adults are disabled, ill, and have little to offer society
  - Focus on “anti-aging” products and “treatments”
  - Prevalence of “age denial”
  - Perception that there’s a zero-sum game between the young and the old
Old Age and Aging Have an Image Problem

After a few days on the trail, you’ll begin to admire her beauty.

At first, you may fail to see the appeal of a 75-year-old woman. But look again and see Chairman Glenn Boyce as she breaks the Bugaboos! The boot that keeps your feet warm and dry when the ground is cold and wet. The boot with waterproof full-grain leather upper, double-adhesive laces, seam-sealed construction, and wool Thermolite insulation. But more important to you, this boot will make sure your feet needs are confined to the path.
Old Age and Aging Have an Image Problem

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Negative Image of Aging Research and Clinical Practice

- Who cares?
- Not “sexy”
- The “softest” of science
- Not about “cure” or “saving lives”
- Why bother?
- Denies future if generational zero-sum game
- Not innovative or different
  - “… geriatrics is no different than internal medicine …”
Images of Aged Differ across Cultures

- In many non-Western cultures, aged viewed in more positive terms
- Not viewed as a burden
- May actually have power relative to younger people
- May be due deference and respect
To date, much less attention
  - Populations relatively young
  - Life expectancy still relatively short in some places
  - Other pressing problems

We know very little

Is an issue of the future
A Developmental Framework

- Thinking about later life in a developmental framework
Aging and Development

- Usually considered separate phenomena
  - Development emphasizes positive change: increasing capacity, complexity
  - Aging emphasizes negative change: loss, declining function
However ...

- Aging refers to process of getting older—not limited to end of life
- Aging isn’t all about loss, there are gains
- Nor is loss universal in degree or timing (just like development)
- Life course continuities in all domains
Psychological

- Cognitive decline
- Adaptations
- Wisdom
Social

- Family and friends
  - Loss of close others
  - Carstensen: “socio-emotional selectivity”
  - Help to others, involvement

- Work

- Civic participation

- Leisure
A Unified Life Course Framework

- Are there symmetries between development early in life and aging later in life such that we can consider them along a continuum? As reflecting the same processes?

- Can we consider older adults as developing in any meaningful way?

- Although much lost, some plasticity remains, though much of it is behavioral or social or technological

- Resilience
“Successful Aging”

- Rowe and Kahn, 1997

- Critics argue that the concept of successful aging needlessly categorizes some elderly as failures