

Successful Aging or Meaningful Decline: Comparative Approaches to the End of Life

4th UCLA Conference on Integrative Medicine and Mental Health



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Successful Aging



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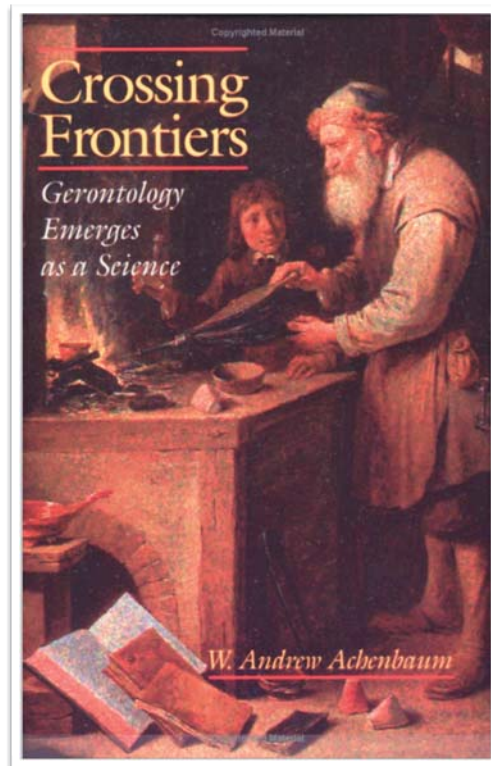
Healthy Aging – The Secrets of Successful Aging



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Linguistic Ability in Early Life and Cognitive Function and Alzheimer's Disease in Late Life

Findings From the Nun Study

David A. Snowdon, PhD; Susan J. Kemper, PhD; James A. Mortimer, PhD; Lydia H. Greiner, BSN; David R. Wekstein, PhD; William R. Markesbery, MD

Objective.—To determine if linguistic ability in early life is associated with cognitive function and Alzheimer's disease in late life.

Design.—Two measures of linguistic ability in early life, idea density and grammatical complexity, were derived from autobiographies written at a mean age of 22 years. Approximately 58 years later, the women who wrote these autobiographies participated in an assessment of cognitive function, and those who subsequently died were evaluated neuropathologically.

Setting.—Convents in the United States participating in the Nun Study; primarily convents in the

Participants.—Co

aged 75 to 95 years a

investigated in the 14

Main Outcome Me

logically confirmed A

Results.—Low ide

written in early life w

idea density in early

cognitive function tha

died, neuropathologic

with low idea density

Conclusions.—Lo

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Sister Mary, the gold standard for the Nun Study, was a remarkable cognitive test scores before her death at 101 years of age. What is more maintained this high status despite having abundant neurofibrillary tangles the classic lesions of Alzheimer's disease. Findings from Sister Mary and the Nun Study may provide unique clues about the etiology of aging and exemplify what is possible in old age, and show how of some c

Key Words: Neuropathology, Alzheimer's disease

Aging and Alzheimer's Disease: Lessons From the Nun Study¹

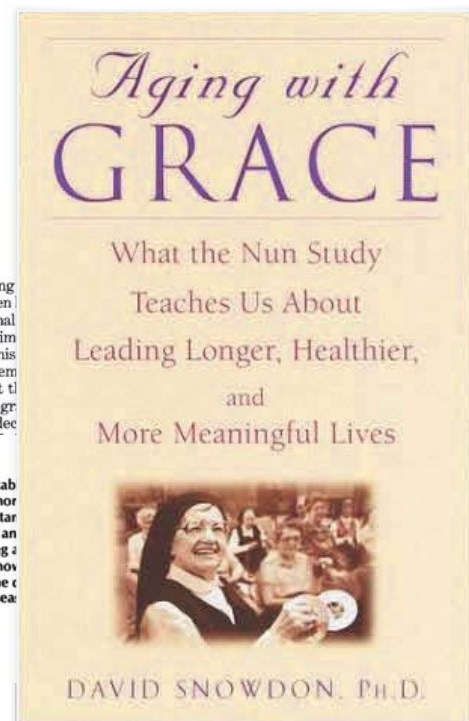
David A. Snowdon, PhD²



And what was the secret to her longevity? I remember her telling me that one day she had wondered out loud to her doctor if perhaps he was giving her medicine to keep her alive, and after all, her desire was to be with Jesus. Her

Catholics, had grade school educations, and were members of the working class.

Shortly before the close of the nineteenth century, Sister Mary began attending St. Boniface Grade School in Philadelphia. A few months shy of her 13th



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Lord, hear our prayer: Prayer, Social Support, and Well-Being in a Catholic Convent

390 ETHOS

This article examines the lives of nuns in the United States. It demonstrates the importance of prayer and social support in the lives of nuns, primarily as a for

Changing God, Changing Bodies: The Impact of New Prayer Practices on Catholic Nuns' Embodied Experience



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Research Article

Overcoming Elderspeak: A Qualitative Study of Three Alternatives

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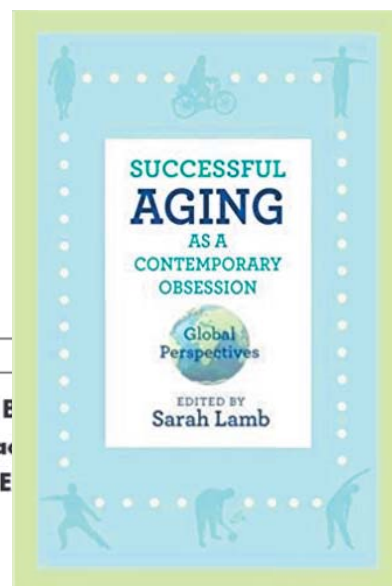
Decision Editor: Barbara J. Bowers, PhD

Abstract

Purpose: This study identifies genres of communication that avoid the features of elderspeak and successfully engage cognitively or physically affected older adults in rich communicative interaction.

Design and Methods: The study examined 100 hr of audio- and video-recorded interaction between older Catholic nuns and their caregivers. The data were collected as part of a 7-year study on the linguistic and communicative factors that contribute to successful aging in a Catholic convent infirmary. Data analyzed in this article were selected from the corpus based on 2 criteria: (a) the interaction was absent of elderspeak and (b) the interaction was between a communicatively or cognitively impaired older adult and a caregiver.

lives of U.S. Catholic nuns following Vatican II; t, among other things, transformed U.S. Catholic del of embodiment with narrative analysis to show nuns' embodied experience as they age. Drawing ree years in a Catholic convent in the Midwestern bodied prayer practices following Vatican II have ie, (2) relationship with the divine, (3) embodied npaced their experiences of and interpretation of ht into how changes in the nuns' linguistic practice ng loneliness and chronic pain at the end of life.



Successful Aging defined as:

“avoidance of disease and disability,
maintenance of high physical and cognitive
function, and sustained engagement in
social and productive activities”

- Rowe and Kahn 1997, 439



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“Our concept of success connotes more than a happy outcome; it implies **achievement** rather than mere good luck....To succeed in something requires more than falling into it; it means having desired it, planned it, worked for it.

- Rowe and Kahn 1998, 37



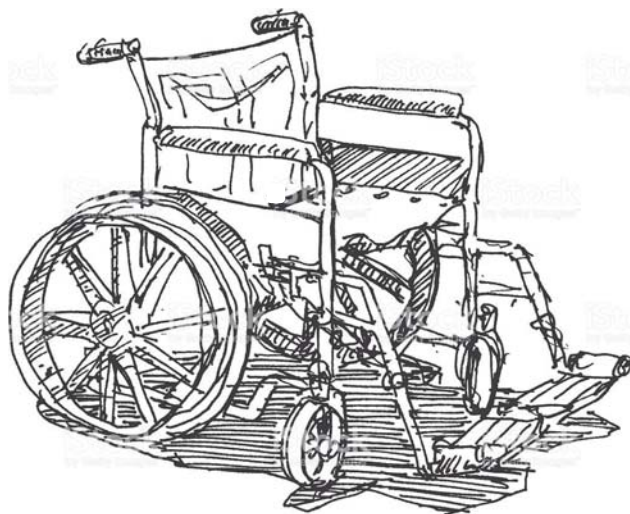
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All these factors are critical to our view of aging, which... we regard as largely under the **control of the individual**. In short, successful aging is dependent on **individual choices and behaviors**. It can be attained through individual choice and effort.”

- Rowe and Kahn 1998, 37



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The successful aging paradigm produces:

“A vision of the ideal person as not really aging at all in late life, but rather maintaining the self of one’s earlier years”

(Sarah Lamb 2014)



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Non-neutral Themes In the Successful Aging Paradigm

1. Individual Agency and Control
2. Independence
3. Maintenance of Productive Activity
4. Permanent Personhood or Ageless Adulthood

(Sarah Lamb 2014)



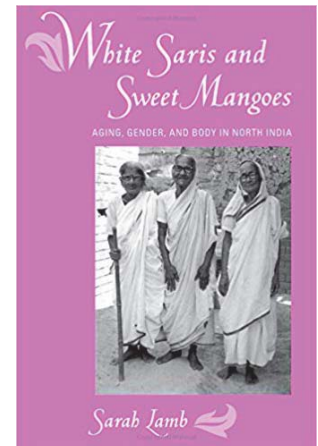
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In West Bengal
India, older people
frequently talk of
readiness for death.



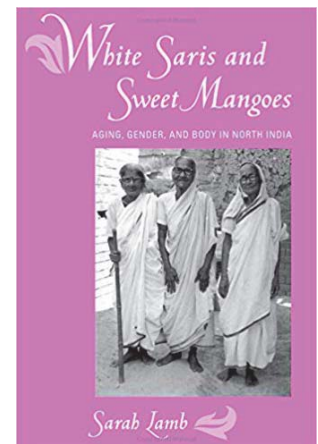
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In many communities,
preparing for decline
and death is a normal,
natural, appropriate
unfolding of the life-
course



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Two Problems with An Uncritical Model of Successful Aging:

1. It is inaccurate: The very communities upheld as exemplars of successful aging don't adhere to the cultural values presented in the model.
2. It produces negative experiences for older adults as it continues to stigmatize aging and construct decline as failure.



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Who ages successfully?



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~~Individual Agency and Control~~ Acceptance



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~~Independence~~ Interdependence



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~~Productivity~~ “Being Good” Not “Doing Good”



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~~Ageless Adulthood~~

All Stages of Life Are Valued



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Video Data

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The Nuns' Model of Aging

1. Locates **control and agency** outside themselves
2. Sense of **interdependence**
3. Values “being good,” not **productivity**
4. Values all stages of life including decline



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An Alternative Model: Meaningful Decline

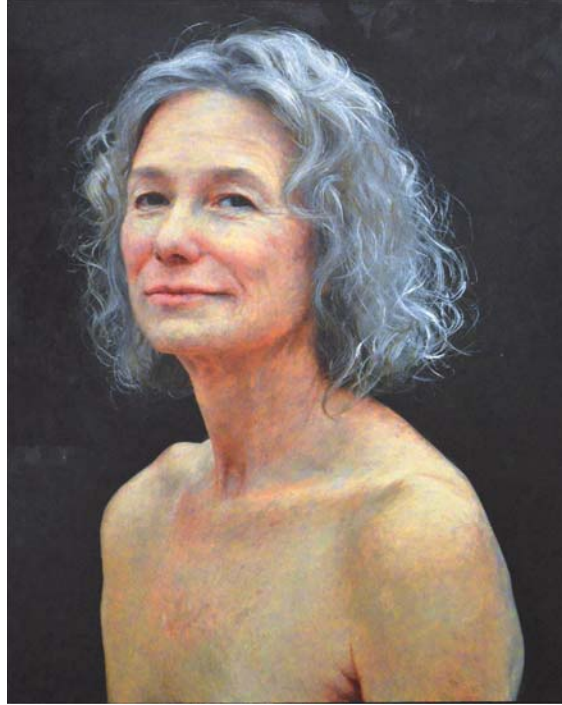


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