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Reflections on Positive Aging in America

A Review of

Too Young to Be Old: Love, Learn, Work, and Play as You Age

by Nancy K. Schlossberg

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Reviewed by

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Nancy Schlossberg's book on navigating transitions as one grows older is a straightforward guide for psychological health and aging. Schlossberg is an expert in adult development transitions and positive psychology. She is a resource and role model on negotiating the many challenges of older age, including health concerns, relationships, financial uncertainty, age-ism, coping with loss, and creating positive retirement options. What I found most engaging about her recent book is that she "practices what she preaches." Her transparency and self-disclosure add credibility to a well-grounded psychological approach to the later years. I applaud her persistence in publishing and appreciate her sharing insights, knowledge, and encouragement.

As the title *Too Young to Be Old: Love, Learn, Work, and Play as You Age* suggests, one's inner psyche may not match the physical realities or stereotypes of older age. Speaking as a recent retiree from a 30-plus year career in academia and counseling university students, I found her book to be personally relevant. It is especially intriguing to me as I age, to find that I am a "young-old" person in a new demographic peer group. As someone who has worked through various forms of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia), I now face another form of oppression—age-ism, and I will no longer laugh at old people jokes.

Schlossberg's book has an angle for everyone, be that for those who are becoming senior citizens, or for adult family members who want to understand how their relatives and families adjust to the challenges of aging. The book is clearly written, and the author interweaves psychological theory and research studies with personal stories gathered through conversation groups and interviews. The engaging narratives relate to topics in each chapter, which then conclude with a "to do list" of positive actions. All of the topics are well documented with footnotes from psychological studies and books with a particular emphasis on positive psychology.

The book is organized around four major sections: Resolving Your Love-Hate Relationship with Aging, Understanding Transitions, Navigating Many Transitions of Aging, and Creating

the New You. The range of chapter topics includes dealing with stereotypes and attitudes toward aging, developing coping skills for change, enlisting family members in conversations about changing roles, cultivating social connections, choosing one's place (home, community, geographic location), and creating one's "own path to positive aging." I particularly liked the chapter on changing family roles with adult children as one loses abilities and independence. I tend to hear complaints from my (young-old) peers about their parents, but certainly the "old-old" adult has some feelings about becoming dependent, too.

My only criticism of the book, or at least an initial impression, was that the book was written for a dominant culture audience (i.e., upper middle class, White, educated, and heterosexual). The book lacked the cultural diversity that I would have preferred, but she is writing from her own experience, and that is good enough. To her credit, she includes narratives from lower income backgrounds and a few gay examples later in the book.

Interestingly, another recent publication on aging by Hollwich (2016) provided a similar guide accompanied with illustrations (graphic designs). This different writing style mirrored a social media approach (brief sound bites with lots of pictures) and provided concrete ideas for making adaptations based on architecture and technology for support. The importance of social connections was emphasized in both publications.

There were a few topics that were missing, however: spirituality and the intricacies of death and dying. The role of religion and spirituality are salient to the aging process (Noronha, 2015). Death and dying is a subject that deserves a full-length book. The author refers to the recent publication by Gawande (2014) on facing end of life and medical decision making. Aging in place (in-home health care) and dealing with medical treatments also were beyond the scope of this book.

I would note that positive psychology strategies are similar to spiritual practices, such as practicing gratitude, generosity (service), reframing, curiosity, and flexibility (see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lewis-richmond/five-spiritual-practices-aging-well_b_1165552.html). Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi proposed that one becomes wiser with age and that generativity and having a role in the community as an elder are important (Schacter-Shalomi & Miller, 2014). Ram Das (2000), a well-known American spiritual teacher, also embraced the value of wisdom in the elder years. Having conversations about spiritual values and meaning making can alleviate anxiety and give purpose as one ages (see <http://www.talk-early-talk-often.com/spirituality-and-aging.html>).

This book is a timely contribution to the field. The "baby boomer" population is approaching 77 million Americans, and current demographic trends predict that 20 percent of Americans will be over age 65 by the year 2030 (Colby & Ortman, 2014). *Too Young to Be Old* is a valuable book for a resource library at senior centers, gerontology studies, college courses on sociology and psychology of aging, practitioners, and as a self-help guide.

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