

Introduction

Throughout history, old age and growing old have been seen as things to be avoided. In the 1400s, Ponce de Leon mythically searched for the Fountain of Youth while Nicolas Flamel turned to alchemy to grant him eternal life. In the 1960s, British rock band the Who sang loudly and proudly “I hope I die before I get old.” In the 2000s, looking one’s age is avoided through filters, botox, and plastic surgery while magazines proclaim that 50 is the new 40.

Things to consider:

How is aging looked at by society?

Is it something that is best avoided or should we detour from our quest for eternal youth?

Is it really so bad to be old?

Assignment

Carefully read or view the following seven sources. **Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three of the sources and develops your position on aging.**

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Source A: Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Source B: Honore, Carl. [“Why We Should Embrace Aging As an Adventure.”](#)

Source C: Perry, Katy. “Teenage Dream.”

Source D: Archer, Dale. Excerpt from [“Forever Young: America’s Obsession With Never Growing Old.”](#) *Psychology Today*.

Source E: Donizzetti, Anna Rosa. Excerpt from [“Ageism in an Aging Society: The Role of Knowledge, Anxiety about Aging, and Stereotypes in Young People and Adults.”](#) *National Library of Medicine*.

Source F: Gregoire, Carolyn. [“Here’s Everything That’s Wrong With Our ‘Under 30’ Obsession.”](#) *HuffPost*.

Source G: Pew Research. Excerpt from [“Growing Old in America: Expectations vs. Reality.”](#)

Source C. Perry, Katy. "Teenage Dream."

You think I'm pretty without any makeup on
You think I'm funny when I tell the punch line
wrong
I know you get me, so I let my walls come down,
down
Before you met me
I was alright, but things were kinda heavy
You brought me to life, now every February
You'll be my Valentine, Valentine
Let's go all the way tonight
No regrets, just love
We can dance, until we die
You and I, will be young forever
You make me
Feel like I'm livin' a teenage dream
The way you turn me on, I can't sleep
Let's run away and don't ever look back, don't ever
look back
My heart stops
When you look at me, just one touch
Now, baby, I believe this is real
So take a chance and don't ever look back, don't
ever look back
We drove to Cali and got drunk on the beach
Got a motel and built a fort out of sheets
I finally found you, my missing puzzle piece
I'm complete
Let's go all the way tonight
No regrets, just love
We can dance until we die
You and I, will be young forever
You make me
Feel like I'm livin' a teenage dream

The way you turn me on, I can't sleep
Let's run away and don't ever look back, don't ever
look back
My heart stops
When you look at me, just one touch
Now baby I believe this is real
So take a chance and don't ever look back, don't
ever look back
I'ma get your heart racing in my skin-tight jeans
Be your teenage dream tonight
Let you put your hands on me in my skin-tight
jeans
Be your teenage dream tonight
(Tonight, tonight, tonight, tonight, tonight,
tonight)
You make me
Feel like I'm livin' a teenage dream
The way you turn me on, I can't sleep
Let's run away and don't ever look back, don't ever
look back (no)
My heart stops
When you look at me, just one touch
Now, baby, I believe this is real (oh)
So take a chance and don't ever look back, don't
ever look back
I'ma get your heart racing in my skin-tight jeans
Be your teenage dream tonight
Let you put your hands on me in my skin-tight
jeans
Be your teenage dream tonight
(Tonight, tonight, tonight, tonight, tonight,
tonight)

Source D. Archer, Dale. "Forever Young: America's Obsession With Never Growing Old." *Psychology Today*.

Today's culture is so obsessed with looking/acting young, it's difficult to believe that our founding fathers powdered their wigs gray in order to appear older and wiser. That's right—being old was in. No more. From hair dyes to Botox to Viagra to wrinkle creams to a plethora of surgical procedures, the race is on to remain forever young.

We are bombarded daily with images via magazines, billboards, television, and the internet. It's all about the look and the image, not about the experience and wisdom behind the eyes. Virtually every public figure from politicians to actors to TV talking heads have had "work" done to their face or body. This mirrors our superficial culture, where anything important can be defined by 140 characters or less.

There are many reasons America is so obsessed with youth, but perhaps nothing has done more to further the cause than the technological revolution. Let's face it—the old are by and large slower and not as connected. How many over 60 do you know that have Twitter, Facebook, or a cutting-edge smartphone? But is this a bad thing?

As the world continues to speed up, the wisdom of the ages can be Googled by anyone. The analog world has been replaced by the digital age. Who needs to ask an old guy for advice when you can become a superficial expert on any topic after 30 minutes on the computer? Few have time to slow down and become a true expert at anything anymore. Why, that could take (gasp!) days, weeks, or even months.

This constant access to information leaves the impression that a tidbit of knowledge, or a sound bite, is enough to be relevant. It suggests that a quick ten-minute read or video is equivalent to wisdom gained from years of hard-earned experience.

[...]

There is no doubt that being young is fast, fun, and exciting. But there is a time and a season for all things. Trying to hang onto the fast lane too long deprives us of the introspection, self-understanding, and deep thoughts that usually accompany growing older.

Just because we can cling to youth a bit longer while life flies by at breakneck speed doesn't mean it's the best way to live. Frank Sinatra (remember him?) said it best in his introspective song "It Was A Very Good Year" that traces life from teens to 20s to 30s and beyond: "But now the days grow short, I'm in the autumn of the year. And now I think of my life as vintage wine, from fine old kegs, from the brim to the dregs. And it poured sweet and clear. It was a very good year."

Source E. Donizzetti, Anna Rosa. "Ageism in an Aging Society: The Role of Knowledge, Anxiety about Aging, and Stereotypes in Young People and Adults." *National Library of Medicine*.

[...] growing older comes with diminished anxiety about aging, but also increases stereotypes and prejudices about aging. Young people, therefore, show a greater preoccupation with the transformations they imagine come with advanced age, which is consistent with the study conducted by Lasher and Faulkender [47].

Worries about the outcomes of the aging process reflect personal fears about aging and are probably related to an inner desire to satisfy social ideals of youth, typical of western societies, which promote an anti-aging culture [58].[...] Anxiety about aging is, then, a predictor of stereotypical attitudes toward the elderly, which, in turn, positively predict ageism both in a direct way and as a mediator in the relation between anxiety about aging and ageism. The relationships between these variables is therefore clarified, and the role of knowledge about aging emerges more clearly, showing that it could lead to a more positive attitude and to less prejudice.

[...]

Young adults, anxious about their future, attribute to older people the negative stereotypes that they fear will describe their own futures [37]. According to Levy's stereotype embodiment theory, stereotypes about older adults are internalized during childhood and, often unconsciously, they produce attitudes, expectations, and perceptions regarding the aging process [18]. The stereotypes that are internalized during youth, which intensify over time, can be contrasted with an accurate understanding of the various phases of the life cycle [44].

Source F. Gregoire, Carolyn. "Here's Everything That's Wrong With Our 'Under 30' Obsession." *HuffPost*.

Forbes' 30 Under 30. *The New Yorker's* 20 Under 40. *Inc.'s* 35 Under 35. *Fortune's* 40 Under 40. *TIME's* 30 Under 30.

Sensing a pattern? We see it all the time in the media: Hyped-up lists of successful people categorized by age -- but always under 40 -- with brownie points given to the youngest wunderkinds of the bunch. And in every magazine profile, whether about an actress or an investment banker, the subject's youth is presented as a badge of honor. "He took the helm at just 26, becoming the youngest CEO in the company's history...", "She published her first novel at 23," or "She earned her MBA from Harvard by 25."

It's safe to say, as Simon Doonan put it, that "Youth is the new global currency." Of course, American culture has long fetishized youth in terms of physical appearance -- plastic surgery and anti-aging products are multi-billion-dollar industries in the U.S. -- but more recently, our cultural obsession with youth has shifted to focus more on success. (Or at least, the traditional markers of success -- money, power and status). In the digital age, anyone can become a CEO (and/or billionaire) by 22. And with people marrying, having children, and buying homes later and later, many 20-somethings are choosing to focus more on work and personal development rather than settling down.

"This is the time to be young and ambitious," *Forbes* wrote last month in the introduction to its annual 30 Under 30 list. "Never before has youth been such an advantage."

While this evolving definition of young adulthood is a positive development in a number of ways -- young people should be encouraged to go out into the world and pursue their dreams -- it comes at a price.

Increasingly, they're being judged by the outward success they achieve by the (rather arbitrary) age of 30. There's nothing wrong with celebrating the achievements of accomplished, driven young people, but the proliferation of "Under 30" lists may perpetuate unhealthy views toward youth and aging. And they could take a negative toll on the way the under-30 set views their own life progress and achievements.

Here are seven reasons we need to do away with the "Under 25/30/35/40" lists and celebrate success (in whatever form it may come) at every age.

We're too obsessed with youth.

You don't have to look far to see how obsessed our "forever 21" culture is with youth. Most TV shows and movies feature 20-something protagonists, and the media loves to focus on the achievements of young people -- and to tell us all the amazing things about being in your 20s.

When we're constantly being made aware of how young (or old) other people are, and marking our lives by the milestones of hitting 25, 30, and so on, age becomes central to our identity.

Obsession with youth also reflects and perpetuates a widespread societal fear of aging. Without a cultural ideal of old age (and even middle age), says psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, "our civilization does not really harbor a concept of the whole of life."

20- and 30-somethings are stressed enough already.

Most Millennials would agree that perusing under-30 lists doesn't exactly make them feel good about themselves. Besides glorifying an overachiever mentality (Achieve as much success as possible, as young as possible!), the lists encourage comparison, offering 20-something a yardstick against which to measure their own achievements -- and inevitably come up short. Millennials are already America's most-stressed generation, and a needless reminder that time's a 'ticken' likely isn't helping matters.

As Millennial trend researcher Maude Standish wrote in a *Huffington Post* blog:

The allure of youth has culturally shifted from being about innocence to being about achievement. Many a Millennial I know has spent a long night pondering their misspent youth after reading the horrible torture

tool that is the "30 Under 30" article. This deep panic is different from what Boomers experienced in their 20s, as many were capable of acquiring the trappings of adulthood early on -- thankfully for them the economy made the dream of a house with a white picket fence a reality.

Feeling that you're somehow already behind in life at the age of 23, or attaching your entire self-worth to external accomplishments, isn't healthy. This can only worsen the unofficial (but all too real) malady known as "time famine," the constant, stressful feeling that you don't have time for all the things that need to get done. Time famine has been found to increase stress levels and decrease life satisfaction -- and it certainly won't help you achieve success in any meaningful way. Life doesn't end at 30, and a goal achieved later in life is in no way diminished because you weren't the youngest person to do it.

Your 20s (and 30s) are supposed to be for figuring things out.

There's been a whole lot of debate about how one should spend their 20s, and everyone seems to have a strong opinion on the matter, whether you view it as the "defining decade" or a 10-year extension of adolescence. But wherever you stand on the matter, the scientific data has shown that in the early to mid-20s, the brain is still developing -- meaning that it's a prime time for exploration, learning and experimentation. (Read: You don't have to have it all figured out.)

For this reason, some experts have argued that it's better to delay major life decisions until the late 20s.

"Until very recently, we had to make some pretty important life decisions about education and career paths, who to marry and whether to go into the military at a time when parts of our brains weren't optimal yet," neuroscientist Jay Giedd told The Wall Street Journal. "It's a good thing that the 20s are becoming a time for self-discovery."

Psychologist Jeffrey Arnett, who coined the term "emerging adulthood," agrees that it's typical for 20-somethings to change their minds regularly and not be sure of what they're going to do. "It's the norm," he said.

Big breakthroughs happen in your late 30s.

If you haven't published your first novel, launched an outrageously successful tech start-up, finished your doctoral thesis, or made your first million by 35, fear not! Research has found that major creative breakthroughs tend to happen in an individual's late 30s.

Researchers from the National Bureau of Economic Research studied the ages of Nobel Prize-winning scientists and inventors, and found that many had their biggest scientific breakthroughs between the ages of 36 and 41. But it's not just in science: Olga Khazan of The Atlantic noted that genius has been found not to decline with age -- Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams wrote over 40 percent of their best poems after the age of 50 -- so don't worry if you've yet to pen your magnum opus.

As Khazan explained, "Genius, it seems, happens when a seasoned mind sees a problem with fresh eyes."

There are a lot of perks to being a late bloomer.

What do Van Gogh, Julia Child and Sylvester Stallone have in common? Their great successes came much later in life -- enough to immediately disqualify them for any "Under 30" list. Van Gogh didn't start painting until his late 20s, and Harrison Ford didn't get his big break in movies until he was cast in Star Wars at age 35.

It may even be beneficial to achieve your greatest successes later in life, after a period of experimentation, learning or even challenges. Late bloomers may be better at developing resiliency, according to some psychologists. They've also had time to experiment, make mistakes, overcome obstacles and learn things the hard way -- which could lead to deeper, more meaningful work down the road.

Letting go of the "life timeline" you've created for yourself -- dream job by 25, marriage by 28, kids by 30 -- can be enormously liberating, and can help you to allow your life and career to unfold organically. And you

never know what the unexpected upsides may be -- as the Dalai Lama said, "Remember that sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck."

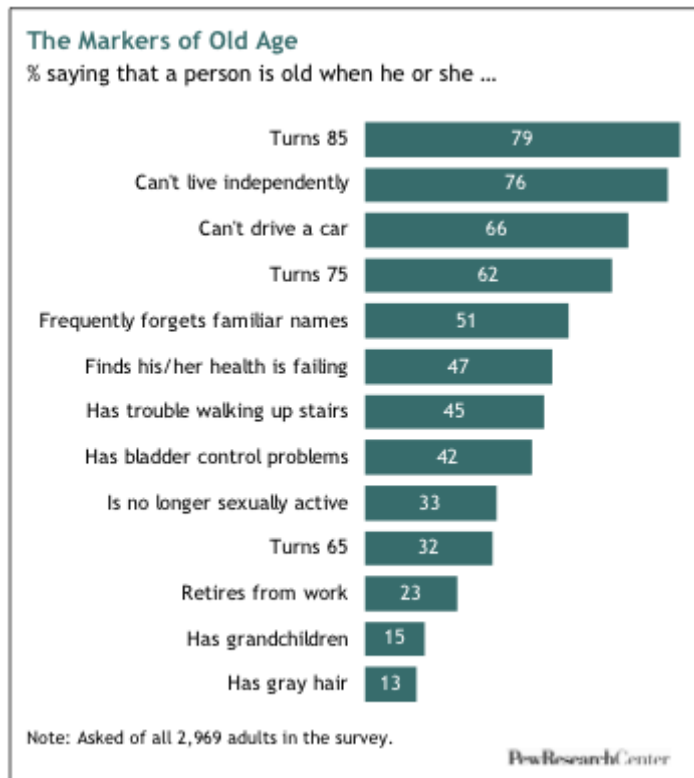
Life gets happier as you get older.

Here's an alternative to keeping a running tally of everything you achieve by 30: Take a page from the book of the older and wiser among us, and make a little time in your pursuit of success to enjoy life's small pleasures.

Life doesn't end at 30 -- or 40, or 50, or 60. There's a lot to look forward to as you age, and an extensive body of research has shown that people tend to enjoy greater happiness, lower stress levels and increased well-being later in life. A recent report found that while young people tend to seek out unusual or exciting experiences, older people are able to derive more value and enjoyment from ordinary, quotidian pleasures. Becoming a CEO in your 20s also doesn't account for much in terms of longer-term life satisfaction. The 75-year Harvard Grant study, the largest longitudinal study ever conducted, found that satisfaction in later life had very little to do with the achievements an individual racked up over the course of his career. In the context of a full life, love and connection to others was a far greater predictor of happiness.

"We found that contentment in the late 70s was not even suggestively associated with parental social class or even the man's own income," psychiatrist George Vaillant, the study's director, told the Huffington Post. "In terms of achievement, the only thing that matters is that you be content at your work."

Source G. Pew Research. Excerpt from “Growing Old in America: Expectations vs. Reality.”

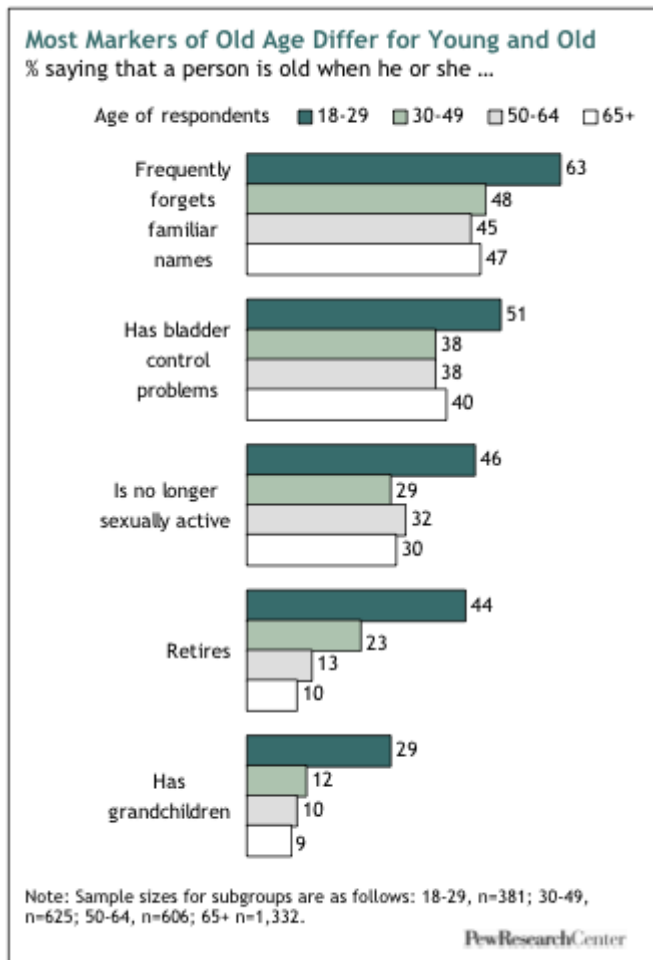


Getting old isn't nearly as bad as people think it will be. Nor is it quite as good.

On aspects of everyday life ranging from mental acuity to physical dexterity to sexual activity to financial security, a new Pew Research Center Social & Demographic Trends survey on aging among a nationally representative sample of 2,969 adults finds a sizable gap between the expectations that young and middle-aged adults have about old age and the actual experiences reported by older Americans themselves.

These disparities come into sharpest focus when survey respondents are asked about a series of negative benchmarks often associated with aging, such as illness, memory loss, an inability to drive, an end to sexual activity, a struggle with loneliness and depression, and difficulty paying bills. In every instance, older adults report experiencing them at lower levels (often far lower) than younger adults report expecting to encounter them when they grow old.[1](#)

At the same time, however, older adults report experiencing fewer of the benefits of aging that younger adults expect to enjoy when they grow old, such as spending more time with their family, traveling more for pleasure, having more time for hobbies, doing volunteer work or starting a second career.



These generation gaps in perception also extend to the most basic question of all about old age: When does it begin? Survey respondents ages 18 to 29 believe that the average person becomes old at age 60. Middle-aged respondents put the threshold closer to 70, and respondents ages 65 and above say that the average person does not become old until turning 74.

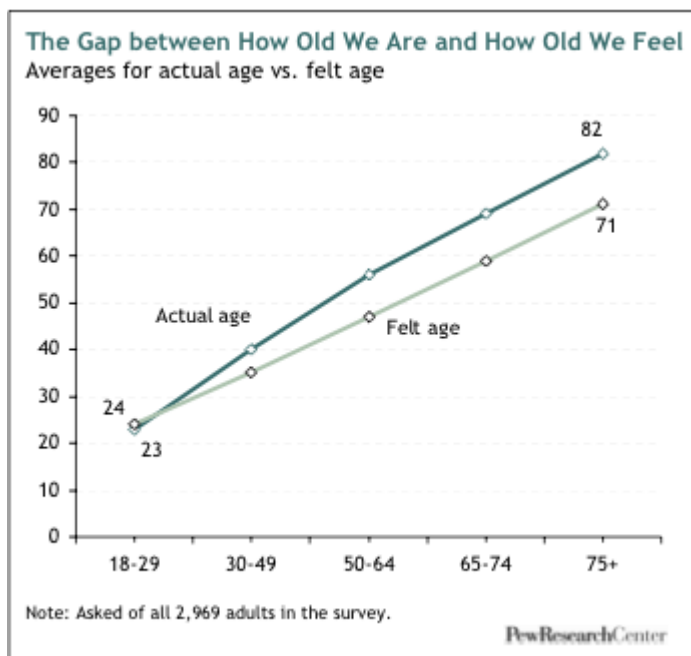
Other potential markers of old age—such as forgetfulness, retirement, becoming sexually inactive, experiencing bladder control problems, getting gray hair, having grandchildren—are the subjects of similar perceptual gaps. For example, nearly two-thirds of adults ages 18 to 29 believe that when someone “frequently forgets familiar names,” that person is old. Less than half of all adults ages 30 and older agree.

However, a handful of potential markers—failing health, an inability to live independently, an inability to drive, difficulty with stairs—engender agreement across all generations about the degree to which they serve as an indicator of old age.

Grow Older, Feel Younger

The survey findings would seem to confirm the old saw that you're never too old to feel young. In fact, it shows that *the older people get, the younger they feel*—relatively speaking. Among 18 to 29 year-olds, about half say they feel their age, while about quarter say they feel older than their age and another quarter say they feel younger. By contrast, among adults 65 and older, fully 60% say they feel younger than their age, compared with 32% who say they feel exactly their age and just 3% who say they feel older than their age.

Moreover, the gap in years between actual age and “felt age” widens as people grow older. Nearly half of all survey respondents ages 50 and older say they feel at least 10 years younger than their chronological age. Among respondents ages 65 to 74, a third say they feel 10 to 19 years younger than their age, and one-in-six say they feel at least 20 years younger than their actual age.

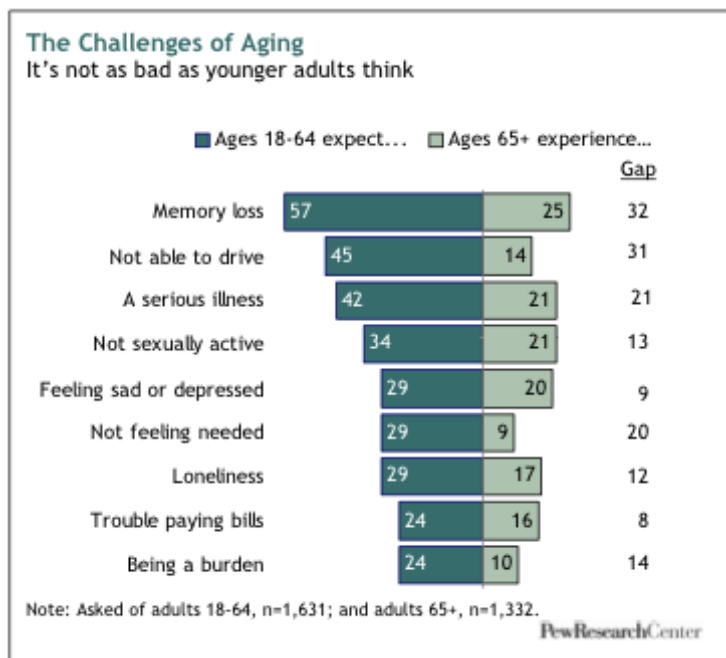


In sync with this upbeat way of counting their felt age, older adults also have a count-my-blessings attitude when asked to look back over the full arc of their lives. Nearly half (45%) of adults ages 75 and older say their life has turned out better than they expected, while just 5% say it has turned out worse (the remainder say things have turned out the way they expected or have no opinion). All other age groups also tilt positive, but considerably less so, when asked to assess their lives so far against their own expectations.

The Downside of Getting Old

To be sure, there are burdens that come with old age. About one-in-four adults ages 65 and older report experiencing memory loss. About one-in-five say they have a serious illness, are not sexually active, or often feel sad or depressed. About one-in-six report they are lonely or have trouble paying bills. One-in-seven cannot drive. One-in-ten say they feel they aren't needed or are a burden to others.

But when it comes to these and other potential problems related to old age, the share of younger and middle-aged adults who report expecting to encounter them is much higher than the share of older adults who report actually experiencing them.



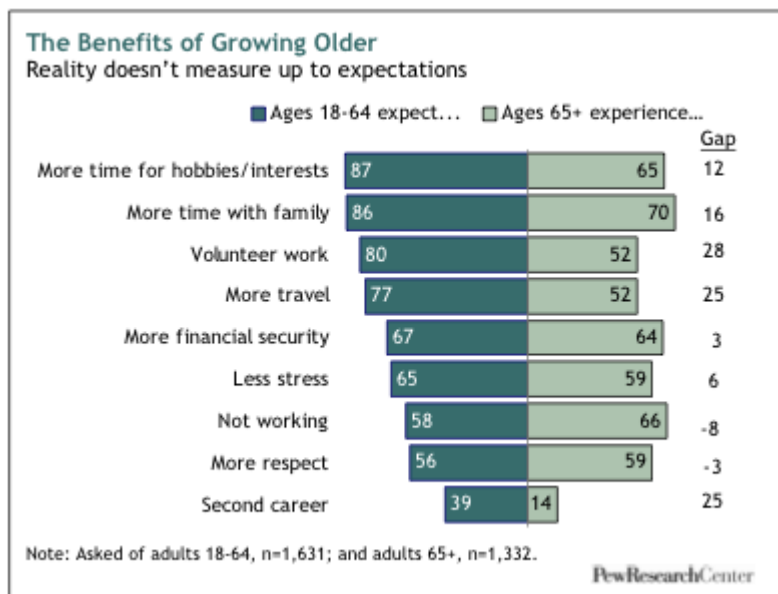
Moreover, these problems are not equally shared by all groups of older adults. Those with low incomes are more likely than those with high incomes to face these challenges. The only exception to this pattern has to do with sexual inactivity; the likelihood of older adults reporting a problem in this realm of life is not correlated with income.

Not surprisingly, troubles associated with aging accelerate as adults advance into their 80s and beyond. For example, about four-in-ten respondents (41%) ages 85 and older say they are experiencing some memory loss, compared with 27% of those ages 75-84 and 20% of those ages 65-74. Similarly, 30% of those ages 85 and older say they often feel sad or depressed, compared with less than 20% of those who are 65-84. And a

quarter of adults ages 85 and older say they no longer drive, compared with 17% of those ages 75-84 and 10% of those who are 65-74.

But even in the face of these challenges, the vast majority of the “old old” in our survey appear to have made peace with their circumstances. Only a miniscule share of adults ages 85 and older—1%—say their lives have turned out worse than they expected. It no doubt helps that adults in their late 80s are as likely as those in their 60s and 70s to say that they are experiencing many of the good things associated with aging—be it time with family, less stress, more respect or more financial security.

The Upside of Getting Old



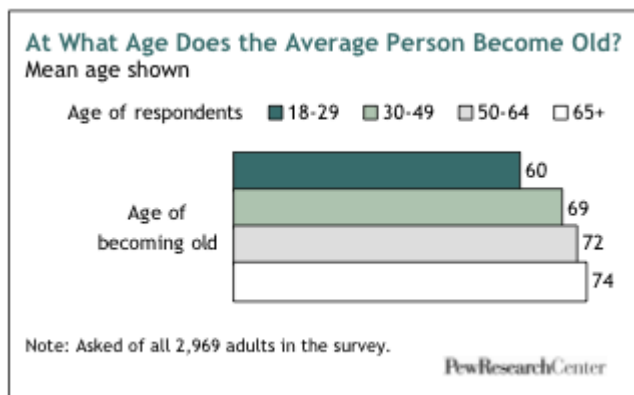
When asked about a wide range of potential benefits of old age, seven-in-ten respondents ages 65 and older say they are enjoying more time with their family. About two-thirds cite more time for hobbies, more financial security and not having to work. About six-in-ten say they get more respect and feel less stress than when they were younger. Just over half cite more time to travel and to do volunteer work. As the nearby chart illustrates, older adults may not be experiencing these “upsides” at quite the prevalence levels that most younger adults expect to enjoy them once they grow old, but their responses nonetheless indicate that the phrase “golden years” is something more than a syrupy greeting card sentiment.

Of all the good things about getting old, the best by far, according to older adults, is being able to spend more time with family members. In response to an open-ended question, 28% of those ages 65 and older say that

what they value most about being older is the chance to spend more time with family, and an additional 25% say that above all, they value time with their grandchildren. A distant third on this list is having more financial security, which was cited by 14% of older adults as what they value most about getting older.

[...]

Perceptions about Aging



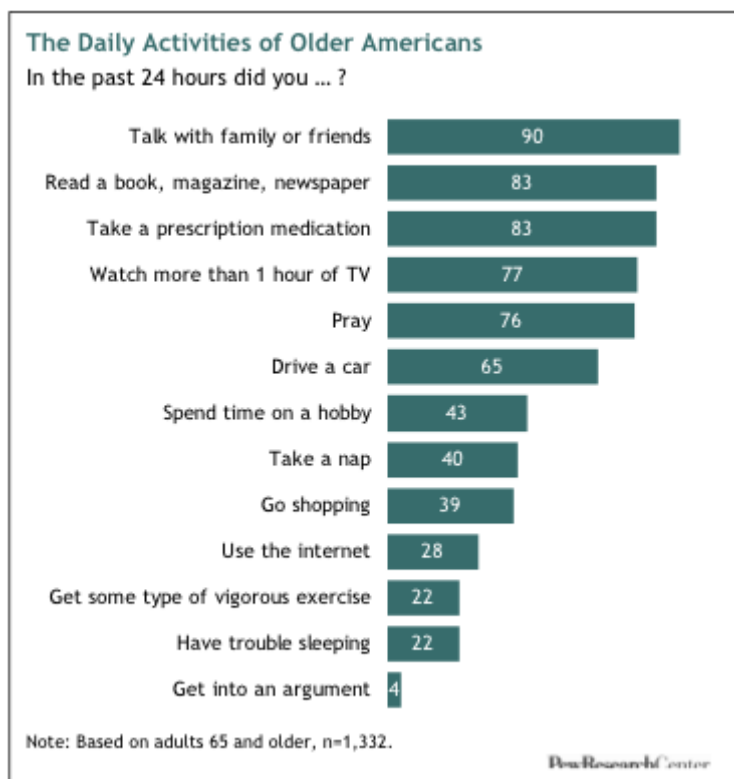
The Generation Gap, Circa 2009.

In a 1969 Gallup Poll, 74% of respondents said there was a generation gap, with the phrase defined in the survey question as “a major difference in the point of view of younger people and older people today.” When the same question was asked a decade later, in 1979, by CBS and The New York Times, just 60% perceived a generation gap. But in perhaps the single most intriguing finding in this new Pew Research survey, the share that say there is a generation gap has spiked to 79%—despite the fact that there have been few overt generational conflicts in recent times of the sort that roiled the 1960s. It could be that the phrase now means something different, and less confrontational, than it did at the height of the counterculture’s defiant challenges to the establishment 40 years ago. Whatever the current understanding of the term “generation gap,” roughly equal shares of young, middle-aged and older respondents in the new survey agree that such a gap exists. The most common explanation offered by respondents of all ages has to do with differences in morality, values and work ethic. Relatively few cite differences in political outlook or in uses of technology.

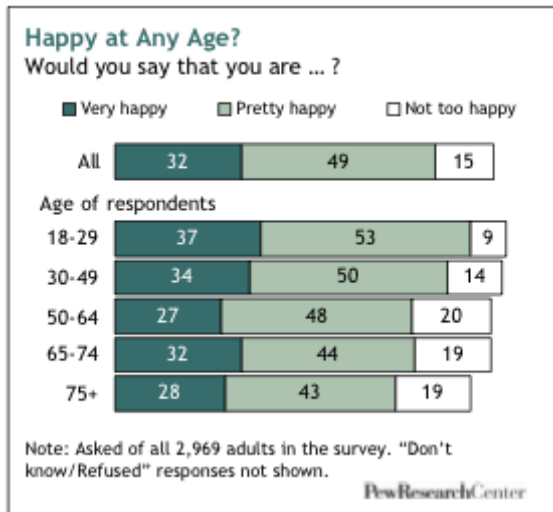
When Does Old Age Begin? At 68. That’s the average of all answers from the 2,969 survey respondents. But as noted above, this average masks a wide, age-driven variance in responses. More than half of adults under 30 say the average person becomes old even before turning 60. Just 6% of adults who are 65 or older agree. Moreover, gender as well as age influences attitudes on this subject. Women, on average, say a person

becomes old at age 70. Men, on average, put the number at 66. In addition, on all 10 of the non-chronological potential markers of old age tested in this survey, men are more inclined than women to say the marker is a proxy for old age.

Are You Old? Certainly not! Public opinion in the aggregate may decree that the average person becomes old at age 68, but you won't get too far trying to convince people that age that the threshold applies to them. Among respondents ages 65-74, just 21% say they feel old. Even among those who are 75 and older, just 35% say they feel old.



[...]



Are Older Adults Happy? They're about as happy as everyone else. And perhaps more importantly, the same factors that predict happiness among younger adults—good health, good friends and financial security—by and large predict happiness among older adults. However, there are a few age-related differences in life's happiness sweepstakes. Most notably, once all other key demographic variables are held constant, being married is a predictor of happiness among younger adults but not among older adults (perhaps because a significant share of the latter group is made up of widows or widowers, many of whom presumably have “banked” some of the key marriage-related correlates of happiness, such as financial security and a strong family life). Among all older adults, happiness varies very little by age, gender or race.