**“Solidarietà intergenerazionale: Universo Argento”**

**(Intergenerational solidarity: Silver Universe)**

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The interface between health care research and policy is typically loose and the relationship between them and social justice is a relatively new concept, especially when it comes to issues of the “silver age”. When these three have interfaced, the synergy has been reserved for those not part of the majority group culture (youth and those from middle age) from which a narrow interpretation of power usually emerges. In doing so, those that are in power selectively choose what avenues it consider outside the mainstream. In recent years, the focus has been on demographics of race and ethnicity and more recent of religious and sexual diversity. When it comes to age attention has been historically given to the young, especially the very young. In western cultures the oldest segment of our population is not only largely ignored but by most standards relatively silent when it comes to being heard, appreciated and protected.

Could this be due to the negative stereotypes often ascribed to growing old in western cultures? As Nelson (2016) has indicated it is often thought that older people are more interested in dying than living, that wisdom cannot be accessed through increasing memory impairment, recovery from illness and affliction including stress is slow as well as incomplete, and their value is only measured by their productivity. These negative stereotypes not only are widely held by both younger and older cohorts but the perceptions can often turn into reality both individually and collectively. Not only does depression increases, resiliency decreases but these individual experiences become collective judgment. That judgment, in turns, evolves into social policy. One example is the high levels of interest in the protection of the young, with both legal and regulatory interpretations of social judgment, but the increasing belief by larger segments of our population that not only the elderly are sources of stress and demand on the culture they live in but that their value should not sustain their protection similarly to other valued and protected groups. Whether it be social, economic, psychological or related concerns the value of the young in today’s world overshadows the wisdom and impact of the elderly. This is particularly problematic with the aging of our population. Take, for example, the very narrow illustration of members of the American Psychological Association. Recent statistics suggest that the *average* member of the APA is well over 50 and an increasing number are over 65. This shift in demographics to an older population is seen worldwide, especially in industrialized countries.

One particularly interesting challenge to aging is that of dementia. Typically, protection of extended life is associated with care of physical concerns, primarily cardiovascular and to, a lesser degree, the dying process. However, the focus on effective cognition and functional integrity is less often considered. Whether it comes from understand its roots in genetics, its expression in diminished memory or in coping with the eventual loss of self, dementia is not only poorly understood but at reaching epidemic proportions. Even less attended to is how to increase efficiency, adjustment and happiness during the solver years. For example, exercise is considered useful for physical viability but less so, if at all, for emotional or cognitive fitness. Furthermore, when “fitness” is considered it almost always “physical” not brain, emotional or socially focused. Recent research indicates that whereas the focus on physical activity should remain, increased and similar attention should be applied to other forms of “fitness” (Smith, 2016). A person living with an intact body but an impoverished mind and spirit is, in many ways, not living at all.

Of particular promise in helping remediate this unfortunate situation is, “brain fitness”. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that brain “activity”, often defined as cognitive challenges, helps keep provide protective covering to existing cognitive abilities. The planning for later life, until recently, has not even been considered of value for psychologists. To ameliorate this glaring oversight, in 2005 the American Psychological Association offered offered guidance for eventual health, legal, vocational, social and psychological changes. (see <http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/lifespan.pdf)>.

Finally, whereas continued interest has been shown for those who are growing old, infirmed and alone, less focus has been provided to caregivers of the elderly. Families are isolated and not well integrated in health systems. These key individuals are critical in the long term understanding, care and welfare of the elderly.

The most recent White House Conferences on Aging, resulted in suggestions for how to tackle these and related impending problems as the world begins to “silver”. Specifically, Gatz, Smyer and DiGiglio (2016) suggested illustrative areas of psychological research that can inform health care and policy. From neuroscience to health care, the underpinnings of appropriate policy should be empirically validated as well as socially justifiable. Bringing together science and policy is a critical first step to a viable front to the challenge of successful aging. Similarly, interfacing both of those with social justice is a critical next step. With science and policy alone, the human spirit will flounder during these tender, critical and wise years. The proposal, as illustrates in this important volume, is to interface all three and to do so with a worldwide vision and impact.

It is in keeping with this vision and these suggestions, the expanding literature, the shifting worldwide demographics and the increasing need for social justice for this largely ignore and unprotected group that this important volume seeks to fill. From genetics to social justice the editors have compiled a series of topics with renowned experts to provide not only Italy but, hopefully, the rest of the world the beauty and wisdom of the silver years. May the present and future generations understand, care and protect the most important and vulnerable group we have among us- those that belong to the “silver years”.

References

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