

Coming of Age: Embracing Realities, Confronting Myths, Reimagining Longevity

UCLA Osher LifeLong Learning Institute

Discussion Group

Fall 2025

Six virtual class sessions. Fridays 10am -12pm (Sept. 26, Oct. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31)

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In this course, we will delve into social constructs of aging, ageism, the science of healthy aging, and the inadequacy of “retirement” as a model for our later years. This course explores the current era of unprecedented human longevity as a pivotal opportunity for societal reimagination—redefining the purpose of this new and uncharted phase in life and identifying supportive policies and practices for healthy, purposeful living into older adulthood. Class sessions will be participatory and draw on weekly readings/videos as well as personal experience.

We are all aging, but experiences of aging can differ substantially. The experience of aging in 21st century America has only begun to be articulated and studied. In that sense, we are pioneers! We will spend a fair amount of time in breakout groups processing the ideas that are shared each week, listening and learning from one another. Please be mindful of the dynamic within breakout groups and create space for all to participate including those who may be less assertive. I am committed to creating and sustaining an inclusive and collaborative learning community, one in which we have a deep interest in hearing each person’s contributions. The goal is to be co-learners together, especially because the course topic is historically recent. We are reimagining aging in this historic moment.

Class Outline & Weekly Preparation

Time required for class preparation should not exceed one hour per week. The readings and videos will serve as a foundation for class discussions so it's strongly encouraged that students set aside an hour a week to complete them. Although we won't explicitly discuss the homework in class, the readings and videos will introduce you to topics that we will discuss in greater depth in the class sessions.

In addition, please start to jot down images and representations of older people you encounter in your day to day life: on the street, in the grocery store, as well as in newspapers, TV, movies, advertisements. Nothing fancy; just jot down observations. These notes will come in handy as we discuss the depiction of older adults.

Be sure to bring something to write on and something to write with to each class. We will often be doing group work and brainstorming.

Session 1: From Triangle to Rectangle: The Demographics of Our Aging Population (September 26)

Objective: Begin to explore cultural norms regarding older adults and survey demographic trends related to aging.

Recommended Resources If you want to go deeper on today's topic:

- [The Stanford New Map of Life.](#)
- The Stanford Center for Longevity produces a weekly newsletter, *Three Not-So-Bad Things on Aging*. Sign up at www.longevity-project.com
- Purtill, Corinne. [“As we live longer, how should life change?” New York Times.](#) November 23, 2021. (this may be available only to subscribers)
- If you want to geek out, the [US Census website has really well designed GIS maps](#) that visualize relative population shifts in various countries.
- “Community Voices.” AARP, 2 May 2024, www.aarp.org/home-family/voices/. AARP has a program called Voices and Community that provides information for specific non-white, cis-gender aging people who identify as Latino, Black, LGBTQ, etc.

Readings/Videos for next class (Class 2):

- Levy, Becca R. (2022) [How positive age beliefs can support positive health outcomes.](#) YouTube: AMA Channel. (20 minutes)

- Buettner, Dan. Jan, 6, 2010. [How to live to be 100+](#). Youtube: TED channel. (21 minutes)
- Wu, Rachel. "TedX Talk: How We Can Learn As Adults." *YouTube*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWukNG1UpEs. (13 minutes)

Session 2: Healthy Aging - Key Factors (Oct. 3)

Objective: Discuss research on healthy aging, zeroing in on the factors research indicates are most important.

Recommended Resources If you want to go deeper on today's topic:

- For fun, check out [this short video with Jane Fonda and Ashton Applewhite](#) that summarizes some of the research we are discussing.
- The Mindful Body: Thinking Our Way to Chronic Health with Dorian Mintzer and Ellen Langer, Revolutionize Your Retirement. 5 September 2023
<https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/revolutionize-your/the-mindful-body-thinking-wAqiaJW-PLQ/>
- Grierson, Bruce. "What If Age Is Nothing but a Mind-Set?" *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 22 Oct. 2014,
www.nytimes.com/2014/10/26/magazine/what-if-age-is-nothing-but-a-mind-set.html.
- Wallis, Velma. *Two Old Women*. An Alaskan legend about internalized aging and how two women overcame it. (available through bookstores/libraries)
- "Live Better, Longer." *True Vitality Test by Blue Zones*, apps.bluezones.com/en/vitality. Accessed 14 July 2024. The Blue Zones folks offer a free 3-minute test that asks about your community, your income, your health, your diet, your exercise habits and then generates, based on an algorithm, projected healthy life expectancy, life expectancy, and "potential" life expectancy with behavior modifications. This is not a required part of the course. If there is a chance that you will find such results emotionally disruptive, please don't do it.

Readings/Videos for next class (Class 3):

- "Is Your Brand Missing out on the 50+ Market?" *AARP*, <https://datastories.aarp.org/2022/represent-age/#/representing-the-50-plus>. Accessed 14 July 2024. Check out AARP's advice to marketers.

- “Ending Ageism Together.” *Changing the Narrative*, 2 May 2024, <https://changingthenarrativeco.org/> Please spend a few minutes reviewing the information and resources on the Changing the Narrative website.
- If you’re on social media, the American Society on Aging is the driving force behind Ageism Awareness Day on October 9. Look for social media posts that day.

Session 3: Media Representation/Role Models (Oct. 10)

Objective: Explore ageism in media and society, analyzing stereotypes and representations of older adults.

Recommended Resources If you want to go deeper on today’s topic:

Want to see images that are positive, more diverse and representative? Check out “The Disrupting Aging Collection” curated by Getty Images and AARP. [“Disrupt Aging Collection: Getty Images.”](#) *Gettyimages.Com*, Accessed 20 July 2024.

Women Over 50: The Right to Be Seen On Screen. Geena Davis Institute. 2020. <https://geenadavisinstitute.org/research/women-over-50-the-right-to-be-seen-on-screen/>

There are a number of Instagram accounts dedicated to ageism and older adult style. To get started, look at @ageismisneverinstyle, @OldSchool_info, @AdvancedStyle, @elizabethwhitefakingnormal. For a real jolt of imagination, @JonasPetersonAI creates images of older adults using AI.

Readings/Videos for next class (Class 4):

[“To the Contrary: Retirement & Aging with MIT Agelab:](#) Season 32: WGTE.” *WGTE Video*, watch.wgte.org/video/retirement-aging-with-mit-agelab-dtuqmx/. Accessed 20 July 2024.

Steinberger, Michael. [Was the 401\(k\) a Mistake?](#) *The New York Times*, 8 May 2024, www.nytimes.com/2024/05/08/magazine/401k-retirement-crisis.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare&sgrp=c-cb.

[“Glide into Retirement.”](#) *Next Avenue*, 27 June 2024, www.nextavenue.org/glide-into-retirement/.

Session 4: Deconstructing Retirement (Oct 17)

Objective: Examine the origin and realities of retirement in the United States

Recommended Resources If you want to go deeper on today's topic:

The Stanford Center for Longevity has [a podcast series, Century Lives](#). Season Six (2024) goes overseas to see how other countries are adapting and re-thinking retirement. Available on Spotify and other podcast platforms.

Two retirement preparation tools:

- Know someone who's beginning to think about retirement? [Gene Cohen's retirement questionnaire](#) (found in *The Mature Mind*) may help them clarify their thinking.
- "Retirement Transition Wheel." *Google Docs*, Google, docs.google.com/document/d/1vw7xwsnSISR_q-eRFT0jllRr1unS2JppEymcEVduXzU/edit. Accessed 20 July 2024. This tool outlines the areas that retirement planners recommend individuals consider as they plan their retirement.

Brooks, David. "The New Old Age." Atlantic Media Company, 30 Aug. 2023, www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2023/08/career-retirement-transition-academic-programs/675085/. (This article is behind a subscriber pay wall. If you want to access it without an account, let me know. I have a PDF I can send you.)

[Renewment](#), 27 May 2024, www.renewment.org/home/ is a nonprofit retiree support group for women.

Readings/Videos for next class (Class 5):

Coughlin, Joseph F. "[Why Businesses Misunderstand Old People](#)." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 10 Nov. 2017, www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/11/older-consumers-coughlin-longevity-economy/545531/. (an excerpt from Coughlin's book *The Longevity Economy*)

"TEDxBoston - Joe Coughlin - [Aging as an Extreme Sport](#)." (12 minutes) *YouTube*, YouTube, 13 July 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoXuG6epkxY&list=PL6CWMV72-Uh09MYFWicGHxXhWQfilNuKc.

Hong, Andy. "[The City Looks Different When You're Older](#)." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 6 Sept. 2023, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/09/06/opinion/seniors-urban-planning.html.

Session 5: Product Design, Public Spaces, and Housing Models (Oct 24)

Objective: Consider everyday objects and spaces through the lens of older adulthood.

Recommended Resources If you want to go deeper on today's topic:

Coughlin, Joseph F. *The Longevity Economy: Unlocking the World's Fastest-Growing, Most Misunderstood Market*. PublicAffairs, 2017.

"[Reimagining Communities](#) for All Ages" | Laura Poskin | Tedxpointparkuniversity." *YouTube*, YouTube, 11 Nov. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjXfWSXoNkk.

Got a product/service idea that you love? You may want to check out *What's Next Longevity Venture Summit*, a [venture capital conference focused on the longevity economy](#). www.boomerventuresummit.com/. Accessed 21 July 2024.

[Village Movement California](#). 17 Apr. 2024, villagemovementcalifornia.org/.

Readings/Videos for next class (Class 6):

None. Come as you are!

Session 6: Purpose and Meaning: Paths to Explore (Oct. 31)

Objective: Explore paths for finding purpose and meaning in older adulthood.

Recommended Resources If you want to go deeper on today's topic:

Legacy Letters/Ethical Wills:

Baines, Barry K. *Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper*. Da Capo Press, 2009. Examples of ethical wills can be found [here](#).

Freed, Rachael. *The Legacy Workbook for the Busy Woman: A Step-by-Step Guide for Writing a Spiritual-Ethical Will*. Minerva Press, 2012.

Examples of ethical wills can be found [here](#) (one of my favorites!) and [here](#).

Periyakoil, Vj. "[Writing a Last Letter When You're Healthy.](#)" *New York Times*, New York Times, 7 Sept. 2016,
www.nytimes.com/2016/09/07/well/family/writing-a-last-letter-before-you-get-sick.html.
More information and template: [Stanford Letter Project](#)

Aging-Related Organizations with Ongoing Activities

[Old School Hub](#). Meetings. Events.
[Oldster](#)

How to Approach Birthdays

Brooks, Arthur. The Atlantic. "How to be your best despite the passing years." May 16, 2024
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/05/birthday-milestone-age-happiness/678378/>
If you can't access it through the Atlantic site, it is also available [here](#).

Additional Aging-Related Readings: Some of My Personal Favorites

Applewhite, Ashton. *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto against Ageism*. Celadon Books, 2020.

Aronson, Louise. *Elderhood: Redefining Medicine, Life, and Aging in America*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Bridges, William, et al. *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Hachette Book Group, 2019.

Carlisle, Andrea. *There Was an Old Woman: Reflections on These Strange, Surprising, Shining Years*. Oregon State University Press, 2023.

Chappell, James. *The Golden Years, How Americans Invented and Resisted Old Age*. Basic Books.

Gendron, Tracey. *Ageism Unmasked: Exploring Age Bias and How to End It*. Steerforth Press, 2022.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara. *The Third Chapter: Passion, Risk, and Adventure in the 25 Years after 50*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Moody, H. Rick, Baby Boomers: From Great Expectations to a Crisis of Meaning. *Generations: Journal of the American Society of Aging*, volume 41, no. 2, summer 2017, pp. 95-100.

Thane, Pat. *A History of Old Age*. J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005.