

Creativity in Relationship

Background Reading

Elders in Relationship

Now I have a positive attitude toward (aging). As hard as I train, as hard as I dive, as hard as I play, I am slowing down. All I can do is enjoy it, if I'm getting old I got to dig it.

- Fred Van Dyke
in *Surfing For Life*

Film is a visual medium, and some of the most significant images of aging in international films occur at the ends of the films when the intergenerational relationships are summed up through key visual metaphors that signify the bonds that have been created and/or strengthened through the action of the film. In every case elders are portrayed as having achieved a sense of harmony and serenity in light of those relationships.

- Robert Yahnke
Heroes of Their Own Stories



What message does this film poster convey about creativity, aging and relationship?

There are many lenses through which to look at aging and relationship. We can explore intergenerational relationships such as those between an elder mentor and a younger apprentice or between a grandparent and a grandchild. We can look at intra-generational relationships such as those between elder partners, friends or siblings. And we can consider inner relationships, those that bring awareness to an elder's personal reflections on himself or herself as a person getting older within the normal human aging process.

Researchers have conducted a number of studies seeking to measure the impact of social relationships on the process of aging. Ken Dychtwald reviewed this research in his book *Healthy Aging*. In his section on "Continuing Engagement With Life: Social Relations" he summed up the results of 17 studies into the effects of social relationships on successful aging. He concluded that lack of social ties is a health risk factor and that, conversely, emotional and material social support can have positive health effects (cited in Rowe & Kahn, 1999, p. 37).

Gene Cohen concurred with these conclusions in his book, *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*. Dr. Cohen concluded that maintaining social relationships can have a profoundly positive impact on the physical health of older people. He cited the positive benefits of social engagement in combating loneliness and reducing blood pressure and stress (Cohen, 2005).

Elders' Relationship to the Aging Self

Research findings also suggest that a positive attitude toward aging may produce health benefits. In 1975 Becca Levy of the Yale School of Public Health began a long-term study of 660 residents of Oxford, Ohio. She asked them to complete a survey about their attitudes toward aging and then correlated their answers with the ages at which they died.

Her findings were striking: "We found that individuals with a more positive view of aging tended to live seven-and-a-half years longer than those with more negative views of aging. This advantage remained after adjusting for a number of factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, loneliness and functional health" (cited in Bucks, 2009, para.2). Levy's finding that people's attitude towards aging was a better predictor of longevity than just about any other measured factor gives a measure of credibility to the old adage "you are as old as you feel."

Research studies can reveal a great deal. So too can "grandmother wisdom" about aging and attitude as offered by four women whom you will see in the film clips.



What message does this DVD cover give about creativity, aging and attitude?

Judy Garland played Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*: "I think there's something peculiar about me that I haven't died. It doesn't make sense but I refuse to die" (Garland, n.d.).

Dr. Shay Bintliff is the physician surfer in *Surfing For Life*: "Old age is like a bank account...you withdraw from what you've deposited. I learned to deposit many healthy habits, giving to others, and memories from an abundant life well lived" (Bintliff, n.d., para 4).

Actress Ruth Gordon commented on playing Maude in *Harold and Maude*: "It's a terrific part, she's fantastic, big acting scenes, deep and moving, then funny, and I sing a song and dance. Talk about vitality, it leaps off the page, and she's eighty! Who could play it but me?" (Gordon, 1986, p. 381).

Tasha Tudor, children's book author and gardener, was profiled in the film *Take Joy*: "It's wonderful to grow old. You can get away with murder. Everyone takes great care of you. And they're afraid of offending you. You can say the most outrageous things and get away with it. I fully believe old age is one of the most delightful periods of my life" (Frog and Toad, 2008, para 8).

Dr. Cohen gets the last word on this topic in his summary chapter on "Cultivating Social Intelligence:"

Social intelligence, memory, and wisdom are closely related fruits that age alone can ripen. The aging brain has greater potential than most people think, and development never stops. Our capacity for social involvement and interpersonal relations remains as strong as ever in later years and is a vital wellspring of both physical and mental health. (Cohen, 2005, p. 134)

Creativity in Relationship Handout

NAME _____

DATE _____

Read over the questions below before watching the short video clips. You may want to take notes as you view the clips. You will then be given time to write your answers after viewing the clips.

Title of Film Clip: _____

1) What are the challenges posed to the elders?

2) What creative ways have the elders found to deal with these challenges?

3) What are some of the creative storytelling techniques used by the filmmaker to illustrate these points?

