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978-0-521-50985-5 - New Frontiers in Resilient Aging: Life-Strengths and Well-Being in Late Life

Edited by Prem S. Fry and Corey L. M. Keyes

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## New Frontiers in Resilient Aging

A typically pessimistic view of aging is that it leads to a steady decline in physical and mental abilities. In this volume leading gerontologists and geriatric researchers explore the immense potential of older adults to overcome the challenges of old age and pursue active lives with renewed vitality. The contributors believe that resilience capacities diminishing with old age is a misconception and argue that individuals may successfully capitalize on their existing resources, skills, and cognitive processes in order to achieve new learning, continuing growth, and enhanced life satisfaction. By identifying useful psychological resources such as social connectedness, personal engagement and commitment, openness to new experiences, social support, and sustained cognitive activity, the authors present a balanced picture of resilient aging. Older adults, while coping with adversity and losses, can be helped to maintain a complementary focus on psychological strengths, positive emotions, and regenerative capacities to achieve continued growth and healthy longevity.

PREM S. FRY is Research Professor in the Graduate Psychology Program of Trinity Western University, British Columbia.

COREY L. M. KEYES is Associate Professor of Sociology at Emory University, Atlanta.

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# New Frontiers in Resilient Aging

*Life-Strengths and Well-Being in Late Life*

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*Edited by*

Prem S. Fry, Ph.D.

*Trinity Western University*

and

Corey L. M. Keyes, Ph.D.

*Emory University*



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I warmly dedicate this volume to my family:  
David and Shaun Fry, and Sheila Dua,  
to the loving memory of my departed sisters  
Bhag W. Malik, Shanta Khurana, Dorothy Lipp Harris,  
and Santosh Dua,  
and to the cherished memory of my parents  
and parents-in-law  
Kishni and Beharilal Dua and Ann and Johann J. Fry.  
*Their irrepressible spirit and their resilience have been truly  
inspirational*  
Prem S. Fry

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age, clinical memory assessment especially for early stages of dementia, longevity, survival, and successful adaptation with aging.

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## Foreword

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*John W. Rowe*

Resilience, as defined by Fry and Keyes, the respected editors of this timely volume, “encompasses normal and exceptional development in the face of risk and adversity, recovery, plasticity and regenerative capacity and the ability to maintain function in the face of disability or physical disease.” In short, the capacity to hang tough and bounce back when, inevitably, something bad happens.

Resilience is a hot topic. Interest is reflected by the rapidly growing multidisciplinary literature reviewed in this book’s chapters, the attention this topic received in 2009 at the Keck Futures Initiative of the National Academy of Sciences, which was entitled “Future of the Human Healthspan” and in the theme of the 2008 annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, “Resilience in an Aging Society: Risks and Opportunities.” In addition, interest in the capacity of individuals to respond to adversity is inevitably spiking as the current economic downturn poses major stress and dislocation for many.

Some of this current interest can be traced to the central importance of resilience in the interdisciplinary formulation of successful aging offered by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Aging in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In that view, successful aging included three core elements: avoidance of disease and disability; maintenance of physical and cognitive function; and engagement in society. Resilience was seen as central to the first two elements and strengthened by the third.

As more and more scholars peel the onion of resilience, multiple dimensions are revealed. Thus, this volume includes scholarly summaries ranging across a wide variety of areas from social and behavioral issues to cognition, health status, and economic factors. As with Successful Aging, analysis of the core determinants of resilience repeatedly underscores the importance of mastery and self-esteem, social support, and the presence of meaningful roles for older persons, whether they are defined in the workforce or via civic engagement.

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While the internal (person-specific) factors that influence resilience are being intensively studied, more attention can be productively applied to the external or societal factors. As the dramatic increases in active life-expectancy of the last century intersect with the aging of the baby boom generation, America is becoming an aging society. The core institutions of that society are not designed to effectively serve the demands that come with a dramatically and permanently altered age structure of our population.

If we are to emerge as a productive and equitable aging society we must recalibrate these key institutions, including the workforce, retirement, education, leisure, housing, transportation, and many others to serve better the needs of individuals. These societal elements are important determinants of the resilience of individuals in an aging society.

Time is short for the development of a proper infrastructure in time for the arrival of our aging society in 2030. We are well aware that societal lag, the resistance of society to evolve promptly in response to society's needs, will make this a difficult challenge.

It is important to understand that aging is a global rather than a domestic issue. Other developed countries, such as in Western Europe and Japan, have aged well ahead of the USA and have been implementing a variety of social policies for a couple of decades in order to cope with the challenges and opportunities they face. These countries have learned some valuable lessons from a variety of social 'experiments' and continue to evolve their approaches in attempts to enhance the resilience of their communities. In addition, these countries may offer valuable lessons for the USA. While differences in culture and the structure of many institutions, including the workforce, old age benefits, and health care, may limit the relevance of the experiences in these nations to our own situation, their experiences deserve careful study.

In recognition of the critical importance of these issues, the MacArthur Foundation has recently established a Research Network on an Aging Society to focus on the development of policies to deal with the challenges and opportunities that accompany the demographic transition in the USA and elsewhere. This volume will serve as an invaluable resource for the Network and other scholars as they engage the issue of resilience at the societal level.

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