Aging

When I think about aging many things come to mind. When will I be old? What bodily function will be the first to go? Will I be able to retire and enjoy my retirement or will I have to work longer? Will I be able to cope with getting older in a society that is fixated on youth? Many of these things were discussed in the articles and video posted.

To a certain extent, I feel old already. As I was reading about B. F. Skinner’s article on Intellectual Self-Management in Old Age (1983), I was surprised to find information that he was sharing as problems with getting older, were issues I already have. Am I already old? Skinner discusses several incidences where memory fails in old age. I experience these “deteriorations” in thinking constantly. Not remembering a name, thinking of something I need to take to school and then not taking it, and losing my train of thought are just a few of the examples that Skinner gives related to thinking (1983, p. 240). As I discussed this with a friend, the friend replied, “I think that it’s interesting that the symptoms that we exhibit because of stress and exhaustion are those that are equivalent with old age” (E. Boswell, personal communication, February 8, 2010). This is a great observation, but how to I combat this sign of aging, or do I?

Aging has changed over time. “In 2006, almost 500 million people worldwide were 65 and older” (Dobriansky, Hodes, and Suzman, 2007). This is expected to grow exponentially over the next few decades. With this change in life expectancy in men and women, it has changed the idea of what constitutes “old.” This change is naturally expected; however, with this change, comes the necessity to cope with the idea of old age and the questions how do we take care of our brain.
Marian Diamond states that “the brain is truly a phenomenal structure, and keeping it healthy for our entire existence on this earth is a goal we can and should all aspire to” (Diamond, 2001). Keeping our brain healthy requires more than just nutrition. According to Diamond, it requires things such as a healthy diet, exercises for the mind and body, challenges for the brain, new ideas, and love (2001). I find these suggestions to keep the brain young, very true. As a twenty six year old, I follow these suggestions on a regular basis. On the other end of the spectrum is my great-grandmother-in-law, Mama Mary. She is ninety-five, lives alone, and is as with-it as I am. I contribute her mental ability at this age to the same factors that Marian Diamond suggests. She eats well balanced meals; she exercises her mind with word puzzles and arts and crafts such as making potholders and beautiful hand crocheted snowflake ornaments. I find that aging brain of Mama Mary is not the brain of other elderly people I have met. I find that she is a great example of how to combat aging gracefully.

Although I am experiencing what skinner refers to as “old age,” I find myself thinking of things that will keep my mind young and fresh (1983, p 239). To combat my forgetfulness, Skinner suggests to “execute as much of the behavior as possible when it occurs” (1983, p. 240). To remember things that I think of at night, I will keep a notebook by the bed and jot down notes when needed (1983, p. 240). As Diamond suggests, I will continue to challenge my brain and keep thinking of new ideas and new activities. Old age is a relative term and is different for everyone. I am feeling old age as a twenty-six year old, while my father is feeling old age in his sixties. I feel that age is a mindset and if you can keep your mind young, then you will age in a way that will make you happy.
References

