

The Superlongevity Revolution: How it Will Change Our Lives

Journal Article Review #1

David S. Robertson

University of West Georgia

Zey, M.G., (2005). The superlongevity revolution: How it will change our lives. *Futurist*, 39(6), 16-21. Retrieved August 24, 2011 from the ERIC database.

The Superlongevity Revolution

The article reports the findings of Michael Zey (2005), executive director of the Expansion Institute and professor of management at Montclair State University, who asserts that we are at a point in human history where we must "...force a reconfiguration of the human life cycle" (p. 16). He writes of the budding capitalistic industry composed of companies and individuals on for-profit crusades to live longer, healthier lives and to achieve what he terms *superlongevity*.

Dr. Spock of Star Trek lore offered the blessing of "live long as prosper" and that is precisely what Zey proposes is coming to pass in the most literal sense. The tools of the trade, according to Zey, include "cloning, cryogenics, tissue research, genetic engineering, bionics, and stem-cell applications" (Zey, 2005, p. 16). For a budget special of \$50,000, customers can have their bodies frozen after death in the hope that science will catch up to their expired life span. Some would place this in the category of science fiction rather than science but Zey writes passionately about longer lives for human beings. So what are the hard facts and figures of life span in real numbers that superlongevity advocates are trying to exceed?

Life Expectancy Statistics

Let us start from the current figures in the United States population and work outward internationally. According to the Period Life Table published by the Social Security Administration, the average life expectancy of a male born in the year 2007 is 75.38 years and for women 80.43 years (Actuarial Publications, 2011). While the material is slightly dated (estimates are for 1997 and 1999), Table 1 below reports great disparity of global life span of the

191 countries as reported in the Healthy Life Expectancy report (2000) by the World Health Organization:

Table 1			
<i>Top 3 and Bottom 3 Life Expectancy Statistics by Nation</i>			
Ranking	Nation	Males (years)	Females (years)
Top 1	Japan	71.9	77.2
Top 2	Australia	70.8	75.5
Top 3	France	69.3	76.9
Bottom 3	Malawi	29.3	29.4
Bottom 2	Niger	28.1	30.1
Bottom 1	Sierra Leone	25.8	26.0

Table 1: Adapted from the World Health Organization’s report on Healthy Life Expectancy at www.geographic.org

Figure 1 below provides a color-coded snapshot from the WorldLifeExpectancy web site (n.d.) that continually updates life expectancy figures from the CDC, CIA, WHO, and World Bank.

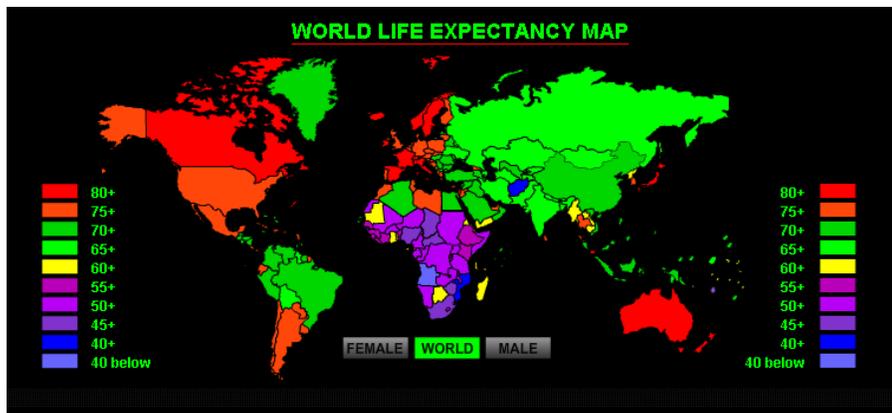


Figure 1 - World Life Expectancy Map

Four Areas Superlongevity Impacts

In his article published in *Futurist* magazine, Zey includes four key categories of life that will especially be impacted by longer life spans.

- **Career planning** – “People anticipating a career spanning nine or ten decades might choose to pursue schooling, career, a career hiatus or sabbatical, re-schooling, re-careering, retirement, re-schooling, and so on...” (Zey, 2005, p. 17).
- **Retirement planning** – Income projection software for retirement planning is being re-written. Marketing thrusts will shift from the 18-39 demographic to the *Ageless Nation*. Cruise lines will roll out one- to six-month cruises to serve as “adult camps” for those with plenty of time on their hands. (Zey, p. 19).
- **The Lifetime Student** – Zey writes that as Superlongevity Revolution gains momentum, training and education will “become an omnipresent and ongoing part of everyone’s life” (Zey, 2005, p. 18). The author contends that 50- and 60-year-olds will reenter colleges and universities to acquire certifications or degrees for newly chosen professions.
- **Marriage and Family** – As people of all ages begin to realize a longer life span, they will invariably factor the anticipated bonus of years into their personal lives and relationships. Zey contends:

Social scientists commonly speculate that men and women anticipating living to 125 or older will not feel pressured to start having children early in life. Rather, it is thought, they will choose to spend their teens and 20s pursuing the training and education. (Zey, 2005, p. 19)

My personal reaction to this article is one of cautious optimism. While I am skeptical about industry’s push for longevity for reasons of profitability, there are scores of researchers conducting scholarly work for the benefit of mankind which is noble. I have great concern over the inequality of expected life spans from rich, industrialized nations in comparison with poor, third world nations. This represents a global crisis and every citizen of the earth has a moral

responsibility to do his or her part to increase the quality as well as the length of life for their fellow man.

References

Healthy life expectancy (2000). Retrieved from

http://www.photius.com/rankings/healthy_life_table2.html

U.S. Social Security Administration. (2011). *Period life table: 2007 data* [Data set]. Retrieved

from <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/STATS/table4c6.html>

WorldLifeExpectancy. (2011). *World life expectancy map*. Retrieved from

<http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/>