Friendship and Happiness in the Third Age

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Abstract:

This chapter examines the research related to only one of the many potential hypotheses derived from Havighurst's (1961) statement regarding successful aging—i.e., that friendship and happiness are positively related and thus the role of friendship provides a viable alternative to adults who have experiences role losses associated with aging. Twenty-five studies of older adults were identified that included a measure of friendship or a related concept and of happiness or a related concept, all of which reported a positive correlation between the two variables. The work of friendship researchers to support Havighurst's vision of social policy designed to promote successful aging is not finished, however. To complete their work, these researchers must encourage interventions to support opportunities for older adults to continue or increase their participation in the role of friendship as they age. For this reason, large, national, probability samples need to be studied over a sufficiently long period of time to ensure that we understand the relationships among aging, friendship activity, and happiness, and therefore any advice based on the available evidence is more likely to be good.

Keywords: Friendship | Aging | Happiness | Older adults | Elderly | Successful aging

Chapter:

Research relevant to understanding the relationship between friendship and happiness among older adults has generally been situated in a broad theoretical literature on well-being in old age. This theoretical literature has evolved over the years, but most of the ideas developed subsequently and the relevance of friendship to happiness were implicit, if not always explicit, in Havighurst and Albrecht's (1953) original statement of Activity Theory in their book, *Old People,* and in Havighurst's (1961) editorial in the first issue of *The Gerontologist*. In this latter publication, Havighurst laid the groundwork not only for Activity Theory, but also for what has since become known as Continuity Theory (Atchley 1989). He also defined "successful aging" (see Rowe and Kahn 1987, 1997) for the first time and foreshadowed elaborations of Continuity Theory by discussing ongoing "competence" (see Lawton and Nahemow 1973; Wahl 2001) and implying the importance of "adaptation" for successful aging (see Baltes and Lang 1997).

According to Havighurst and Albrecht (1953), the aging individual should compensate for role losses associated with aging, such as retirement or the death of a spouse, by increasing activities in other areas; friendship is a voluntary activity in our society, so it represents such an opportunity. In his role as the founding editor of *The Gerontologist*, Havighurst (1961) further argued that gerontologists should research and promote "successful aging" or the "maximization of satisfaction and happiness" for all age groups and segments of society (p. 8). In this statement, he refers to friendship as an "intangible good" with no "arbitrary limits to its production" and therefore available to older adults as a way to remain active. Building on earlier work encouraging gerontologists to focus on establishing the distinction between normal and successful aging as non-pathologic states rather than on establishing the distinction between pathological and normal aging (Rowe and Kahn 1987), Rowe and Kahn (1997) later elaborated on Havighurst's definition of "successful aging." They described it not only as "the absence of disability and disease and high cognitive functioning," but also, in keeping with Havighurst's reference to the opportunity to develop friendships to offset role loss, as "active engagement in society" (p. 433).

In this same 1961 editorial, Havighurst critiqued Disengagement Theory, which, in contrast to Activity Theory, posited that a mutual withdrawal of the individual and society contributed to successful aging (Cumming and Henry 1961). Although Havighurst noted that "there is no doubt that disengagement does take place with aging," he also observed that "the proponents of Activity Theory regard this as a result of withdrawal by society from the aging person, against the will and desire of the person" (p. 9). He argued that in contrast to activity theorists, disengagement theorists viewed the process "as natural" and "the aging person accepting and desiring it" (p. 9). Furthermore, laying the foundation for Atchley's (1989) formal statement of Continuity Theory, which has since informed most ensuing theoretical developments in this area, Havighurst (1961) described successful aging as the "[m]aintenance of middle-age activity" and states that it "may be defined as maintenance of the level and range of activities that characterize a person in his prime of life with a minimum downward adjustment" (p. 10).

Building on the foundation provided by Havighurst, Atchley (1989) described "continuity" as "a grand adaptive strategy that is promoted by both individual preference and social approval" (p. 183). In contrast to Disengagement Theory, which had fallen out of favor along with most other functionalist theories by 1989, he argued that

> … in making adaptive choices, middle-aged and older adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures; and they prefer to accomplish this objective by using strategies tied to their past experiences of themselves and their social world. Change is linked to the person's perceived past, producing continuity in inner psychological characteristics as well as in social behavior and in social circumstances" (p. 183).

Since then, gerontologists have continued to focus on the importance of adaptation as part of the process of successful aging. Like Havighurst (1961), who defined "success" as "competent behavior in the common social roles of worker, spouse, homemaker, citizen, friend, association member, and church member" and assessed performance of older adults in these roles as

compared to societal norms as a measure of successful aging, more recent gerontologists have focused on the relation between the person and the environment and the goodness of fit between them. Goodness of fit is sometimes achieved through adaptation of the individual (Baltes and Lang 1997), modifications to the environment (Lawton and Nahemow 1973; Wahl 2001), or the older adult's identification of and relocation to new environments more suitable for an aging individual (Kahana 1982).

Measuring Friendship and Happiness among Older Adults

Gerontologists who have examined the relationship between friendship and happiness have thus framed their research using a variety of theories of successful aging, by whatever name, or at least have been informed by many distinct theoretical and empirical elaborations of Havighurst's original idea. Sometimes a study is designed primarily and intentionally to examine the relationship between these concepts or related ones, and other times relevant findings are buried amongst others more central to the focus of the research. Furthermore, depending on the time period or their theoretical inclinations, gerontologists have used a slightly different vocabulary or measured slightly different concepts. Some of these researchers have explicitly measured friendship or happiness, but most have measured only related or more general concepts instead. As a result, identifying the empirical literature on the relationship between friendship and happiness required that a broad net be cast and that we be satisfied with a less than comprehensive search. Our search for literature on the relationship between friendship (or a related concept) and happiness (or a related concept) ultimately yielded 25 articles. Despite our efforts, we know we missed many articles because we continued to notice additional ones referenced in the publications we did find. Although some of the studies we identified are multi-method (e.g., Mathieu 2008), none of them are purely qualitative. For these reasons, the following synthesis of the research on the relationship between friendship and happiness during the third age should be considered illustrative instead of comprehensive and suggestive rather than definitive.

Although some studies of younger age groups explicitly measure both "friendship" and "happiness" (e.g., Demir and Davidson 2013), we did not find any such studies of older adults. The 25 studies we review thus include those with a direct measure happiness and at least one measure of a concept related to friendship, at least one measure of a concept related to happiness and at least one direct measure of friendship, or at least one measure of a concept related to each.

The measures of friendship or related concepts included in these studies are sometimes social psychological (i.e., quality of friendships) and other times focus on process or are social structural (i.e., including the quantity of friendship activity and number of friends; Adams and Blieszner 1989; Adams and Blieszner 1994). Social psychological measures of friendship and related concepts include the perceived importance of friendship (Sui and Phillips 2002), satisfaction with social relationships (Albert et al. 2010), perceived social relations (Baldassare et al. 1984), perceived social support (Cummings 2002; Fitzpatrick et al. 2008), perceived emotional support (Patrick et al. 2001), sense of belonging to a community (Theurer and Wister 2010), and need to belong (Stevens et al. 2006). Many of the social structural and process measures of concepts related to friendship focus on some aspect of social support including: reciprocity of support (Wrzus et al. 2012), social and instrumental support (Aday et al. 2012),

social support network structure (Bowling and Browne 1991), size of support network (Stephens and Bernstein 1984; Thomas 2010), and number of types of support (Thomas 2010). Fiori et al. (2007) measured most of these social support variables and others using the social network mapping technique Antonucci (1986) developed. Various other structural and process measures of friendship capture the presence of friends or the extent of interaction with them, including social isolation (Chappell and Badger 1989), loneliness (Lee and Ishii-Kuntz 1987), closeness of friends (Albert et al. 2010; Wrzus et al. 2012), presence of a confidant (Keith et al. 1984), number of friends or size of network (Adams 1988; Chan and Lee 2006), number of close friends (Adams 1988; Theurer and Wister 2010), number of local friends (Adams 1988), development of new friends (Cook 2006), contact with friends (Adams 1988; Blieszner 1995; Johnson and Troll 1994; Sui and Phillips 2002; Wrzus et al. 2012), online contact with friends (Parks et al. 2012), and social activity participation (Aday et al. 2012; Graney 1975; Mathieu 2008; Osberg et al. 1987).

Not only do the measures of friendship included in these studies vary, because in our society friendship lacks cultural and structural definition (Adams 1989; Allan 2010), the way people define "friendship" varies as well. Some people use the term "friend" to include mere acquaintances and others use narrower definitions (Adams 1989), and some people use it to refer exclusively to non-kin and others include relatives (Demir et al. 2013). Researchers who study college students recommend that "researchers provide participants with an easy to understand definition that specifies the criteria against which to identify a friend" (p. 865). Their concern is that their participants vary in whether they named romantic partners and siblings as friends. In contrast, researchers who study friendships among older adults have recommended and have demonstrated a commitment to understanding the way in which people define and use the term "friend" by engaging in more inductive studies (e.g., Adams et al. 2000). Their concern has been that *a priori* definitions of friendship limit studies to a subtype of friendship and that any definition would not address all possible sources of variation in meaning (Adams 1989).

It is possible the differences in these recommendations reflect the differences in the ages of those studied. Although the studies are now dated and the specific information mentioned here has never been published, two studies of older adults suggest that, unlike college students (Demir et al. 2013), older adults rarely list siblings or romantic partners as friends (i.e., the studies reported in Adams 1988, and Blieszner 1995). In fact, results published from the earliest of these studies suggest that older women do not often even consider men as friends—only a fifth of the women named a male friend (Adams 1985). Of course, these studies were conducted a long time ago. Even back in 1985 it was clear that norms would probably shift (Adams 1985). Nonetheless, we were able to identify only one study to include in this review that examines cross-sex friendships (Keith et al. 1984), and it was also conducted in the mid-eighties. Another possible reason for this difference in perspective between researchers of different stages of life is that as people age their conceptions of friendship become more complex (Weiss and Lowenthal 1975), and thus providing a simple definition to resonate with participants would be more challenging when studying older adults.

The studies included in this review not only vary in terms of how friendship is measured but also by whether they include a measure of happiness per se (Chan and Lee 2006; Graney 1975; Theurer and Wister 2010) or a related measure. The related measures include: affect balance or

positive affect (Adams 1988; Blieszner 1995; Johnson and Troll 1994; Parks et al. 2012; Patrick et al. 2001; Sui and Phillips 2002; Thomas 2010), life satisfaction (Aday et al. 2012; Albert et al. 2010; Cummings 2002; Keith et al. 1984; Mathieu 2008; Osberg et al. 1987; Stephens and Bernstein 1984), morale (Lee and Ishii-Kuntz 1987); and emotional, self-reported, subjective, or psychological well-being (Baldassare et al. 1984; Bowling and Browne 1991; Chappell and Badger 1989; Cook 2006; Fiori et al. 2007; Fitzpatrick et al. 2008; Wrzus et al. 2012).

The Relationship Between Friendship and Happiness Among Older Adults

Note that whatever the measure of friendship or related concept and whatever the measure of happiness or related concept, researchers have always found the correlation between them to be positive. If this finding were not consistent across studies, the absence of replications of studies using the same measures would make it difficult to summarize and interpret this literature. Given the overall consistency of findings despite the lack of consistency of measurement, however, it is clear that this positive association transcends measurement issues and this general finding is robust.

Since the late 1970s when Larson (1978) summarized the then 30 years of research on subjective well-being, it has been clear that not only is the relationship between friendship activity and psychological well-being positive, the relationship is stronger than the positive relationship between family activity and psychological well-being. Although it would be possible to reference many studies from the 1960s (e.g., Pihlblad and McNamara 1965) and beyond to support this statement, it is more parsimonious to cite a meta-analysis synthesizing findings from 286 studies which confirms that frequency of contact with friends is more closely related to subjective well-being than frequency of contact with family members (Pinquart and Sorenson 2000). *Ad hoc* explanations for the positive relationship between friendship activity and happiness are rarely offered, presumably because the relationship is expected based on theories of successful aging, but *ad hoc* explanations of the greater strength of the friendship-happiness connection compared to the family-happiness connection provide some insight into this robust bivariate correlation as well. One obvious explanation for the difference in the strength of the correlations is Dykstra's (1990) finding that the quality of relationships between friends is often higher than the quality of relationships with adult children. The question is "why?" Unlike family relationships, friendships are voluntary. Interaction with family members is often dictated by obligation, whereas interaction with friends is primarily motivated by pleasure (Pinquart and Sorenson 2000). Because friendships are not structurally determined as family relationships and neighbor relationships are (Allan 2010), it is possible to select people as friends who are similar in statuses, roles, and values, and therefore are in a good position to offer emotional support and advice (Litwak 1989). Although some friendships certainly involve negative exchanges, because friendships are voluntary in most societies (Cohen 1961), problematic friendships can be ended or, more typically, allowed to fade away (Blieszner and Adams 1998). So because friendship is voluntary, relationship quality is relatively high, interactions and shared activities are more likely to be enjoyable, friends are well-positioned to offer emotional support, and if all else fails, a friendship is easy to end. These characteristics of friendship suggest plausible explanations for the positive relationship between friendship and happiness itself.

Unfortunately, very few of the studies included in this literature review empirically examine mediators and moderators of the relationship between friendship and happiness. Similarly, although some of the studies reviewed here include both social and psychological measures of friendship, none of them were designed specifically to examine whether social psychological measures of friendship (i.e., perceptions of quality) or process and structural measures of friendship (i.e., quantity) are better predictors of happiness. Although in the late 1970's, and through the 1980's, it appeared that a coherent literature on friendship during old age was emerging, the more recent literature cited here was not authored by a community of friendship scholars interested in understanding its relationships with happiness, but by researchers interested in related topics for a variety of theoretical reasons. Furthermore, unlike friendship researchers who study college students (e.g., Demir and Özdemir 2010; Demir et al. 2011), those who study older adults have focused more on friendship as an outcome than as a predictor of happiness, possibly because they are more interested in the tangible social support provided by friends to older adults than the less tangible effects that social relationships have on psychological well-being.

Future Directions

The literature clearly demonstrates that friendship and happiness are positively related, but the lack of replications using the same measures, the absence of studies of mediators and moderators of this positive relationship, and the failure of older adult researchers to examine the relative effect of social psychological and process or structural measures of friendship on happiness, as well as other study design issues, make it difficult to state other more complex and detailed generalizations about the literature with confidence. These other study design issues, discussed in greater detail below, include issues regarding the nature of populations, size and quality of samples, lack of studies including comparisons across geographically-distinct populations and population subgroups, and a scarcity of longitudinal studies. These same general study design issues have plagued the research on friendship for decades (Blieszner 1989).

Large, National, Probability Samples

Friendship research in general, and research focusing on the relationship between friendship activity and happiness in particular, would benefit from the collection of data from large, national probability samples–large so variation can be examined, national so findings from special purpose studies do not dominate our understanding of friendship in the United States, and probability so generalizations can be stated with confidence. Of the 25 studies cited in this chapter that examine the relationship between a measure related to friendship and a measure related to happiness, five of them are based on sample sizes of greater than 1000. These include studies based on Fischer's (1982) Northern California data (Baldassare et al. 1984), of older workers in a Midwestern state (Keith et al. 1984), of older adults in Washington state (Lee and Ishii-Kuntz 1987), based on the Canadian General Social Survey (Theurer and Wister 2010), and of adults identified online as happiness seekers who subsequently purchased an app for their iPhones and completed a survey (Parks et al. 2012). All of these studies are based on probability samples except the latter one, which takes advantage of recent developments in smart phone technology to collect data on emotions and reactions to them as they are experienced. Note that although none of these studies is a national study of older adults in the United States where most

other research on this topic has taken place, one of them is a national study of Canadians. The only other national study referenced in this chapter (Thomas 2010) is based on data from the Social Networks in Adult Life survey ($N = 689$) conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan (Kahn and Antonucci 1980). Most of the 25 studies discussed in this chapter are based on small regional, local, or specialized samples and were designed for purposes other than the study of the relationship between friendship and happiness.

Comparisons Across Geographically-Distinct Populations and Population Subgroups

Twenty years ago, hardly any studies of friendship and well-being had been conducted outside of the United States. Research in this area continues to focus mainly on United States subpopulations, but research on the relationship between friendship and happiness in other countries has become more common. The studies mentioned here include two conducted in Canada (Fitzpatrick et al. 2008; Theurer and Wister 2010), two in China (Chan and Lee 2006; Sui and Phillips 2002), three in Germany (Albert et al. 2010; Fiori et al. 2007; Wrzus et al. 2012), and one in England (Bowling and Browne 1991). Additional studies have undoubtedly been conducted in other countries as well. None of the studies included here are comparative, however. Furthermore, many of the authors do not even speculate about contextual effects so the contribution of international studies to furthering our understanding of the relationship between friendship and happiness is still limited.

The authors of two studies are exceptions. In discussing the similarity of their findings from their two studies involving German adults between 30 and 86 years old to those of studies conducted on similar populations in other countries, Wrzus et al. (2012) "do not assume" their "findings are specific to German friendships and social networks" (p. 478). Although, in their study of older adults in Beijing and Hong Kong, Chan and Lee (2006) did not speculate about international effects, they did find differences across the two cities which they speculate can be explained by "the differences between socialist Beijing and capitalist Hong Kong in degrees of modernization and urbanization and in social organization of work and community life" (p. 87). One could extend their explanation to address any differences between their Beijing findings and findings from studies conducted in capitalist countries.

Similarly, our literature search did not reveal any recent studies comparing findings about the relationship between friendship and happiness in rural and urban areas. One exception is a study Baldassare et al. (1984) conducted, but the data were collected four decades ago and were limited to Northern California (Fischer 1982). Other studies of urban areas, such as a Boston study of disabled elderly adults (Osberg et al. 1987), were not focused on contextual effects at all and, as such, the context was a convenience rather than essential to the study design. In contrast, in Patrick et al. (2001) study of older men and women living in Northern Appalachia in West Virginia, context was important to their interpretation of data. The authors note, for example, that "[t]he challenges of a rural environment may exert more negative effects among women than they do upon men" (p. 16). In the absence of studies comparing urban and rural findings, hypothesizing contextual explanations is at least be a step in the right direction.

We could find no studies comparing the relationship between friendship activity and happiness for those who live independently to those who do not, but we did find a couple studies focusing

exclusively on assisted living facilities (Cummings 2002; Street et al. 2007; Patrick et al. 2001). Both of these studies focus on the characteristics of the environment that facilitate or discourage friendship activity among increasingly frail older adults. Conducting studies in other environments, such as skilled nursing facilities, naturally occurring retirement communities, and age-segregated communities, and comparing results across them may suggest other possibilities.

Although comparative studies across geographically distinct contexts (e.g. international, urban vs. urban, independent living vs. other living arrangements) or ethnic groups are rare, comparisons of the findings about the relationship between friendship and happiness across male and female subpopulations within samples are more common. So for example, not only can we learn about gender differences by comparing findings across studies of women (Graney 1975; Johnson and Troll 1994; Sui and Phillips 2002) and of men (Keith et al. 1984), but also from studies including both genders (Baldassare et al. 1984; Chan and Lee 2006; Cummings 2002; Fitzpatrick et al. 2008; Patrick et al. 2001).

Longitudinal Studies

Perhaps the greatest need for future research on the relationship between friendship and happiness is for longitudinal studies including measures of both concepts as well as of age. As reflected in the order of the listing of concepts in the titles of the articles referenced here, most researchers make an assumption that friendship affects happiness rather than vice versa. Titles such as "Friendship processes and well-being" (Blieszner 1995), "Social networks, health, and emotional well-being" (Bowling and Browne 1991), and "Network size, social support, and happiness in later life" (Chan and Lee 2006) all reflect this assumption about the causal ordering of variables. This assumption is not surprising given that the theory guiding much of this research has focused on successful aging rather than on the development of social networks.

Recent work suggests, however, that happiness could lead to an increase in friendship activity rather than the reverse (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). Two very small, old, short-term longitudinal studies also suggest this alternative interpretation and the more likely alternative that the relationship between friendship and happiness might be reciprocal rather than unidirectional (Adams 1988; Graney 1975). Without longitudinal data on larger samples over a longer period of time, it is unlikely this theoretical framing will be challenged.

Furthermore, in the context of some recent research (Stone et al. 2010) a study which would allow for the specification of the relationships among age, friendship activity, and happiness does seem warranted. Stone et al. (2010) recently demonstrated that happiness declines steadily during young adulthood, but after about age 50, people become increasingly happier with age. These findings have been replicated over the lifespan, over a period of 40 years, in dozens of countries, and for a wide range of well-being measures. The reasons for this U-bend in happiness are still unclear, but recent evidence that the same pattern exists among the great apes as among humans (Weiss et al. 2012), as well as the consistency of the findings across human cohorts and contexts, suggest that the explanation is probably biological or psychological rather than sociological. A sociological explanation is unlikely because it would have to apply universally or at least to all of the contexts in which the U-bend in happiness has been identified.

So how does friendship activity fit into this picture? As discussed throughout this chapter, findings regarding the existence of a positive relationship between friendship activity and happiness during old age are robust. Furthermore, although based exclusively on one of the same small longitudinal studies cited above, we know some people increase their friendship activity during old age relative to middle age and others decrease it (Adams 1987), a meta-analysis of 277 studies with 177,635 participants suggests that on the average, friendship activity declines with age (Wrzus et al. 2013). Examining cross-sectional studies and comparing number of friends across age groups suggests friendship activity remains fairly stable across the life course, but no data suggest that it increases on the average with age (Blieszner and Adams 1992). So assuming friendship activity remains constant throughout the third age, the increase in happiness as people age would be entirely attributable to other factors. If friendship activity decreases throughout the third age, then these other factors must also have a strong enough positive effect on happiness to offset the negative impact of a decrease in friendship activity. Biologists argue that one relevant factor is deterioration in the frontal lobe beginning in midlife, which increases optimism (Sharot 2011, 2012). Psychologists argue that because the old know they are closer to death, they focus on things that are important in the moment and less on long-term goals and are therefore happier than younger people (Cartensen et al. 1999). These hypotheses are consistent with recent analyses that suggest that the positive relationship between friendship and happiness may not be as strong as suggested in the literature and is the result of shared variance (Lucas et al. 2008). Longitudinal studies including measures of age, friendship activity, and happiness, as well as other potentially relevant biological, psychological, and sociological factors, are clearly needed to resolve this interdisciplinary debate.

Practical Implications

Whether the common interpretation of the causal direction of the relationship between friendship and happiness is accurate or alternatively that the relationship between friendship and happiness is reciprocal, and whether friendship activity remains constant or decreases as people age, the studies we review here suggest that interventions to enhance friendship activity during the later years should lead to higher levels of happiness among older adults. Friendships interventions can be designed to affect individuals by improving their cognitive and social functioning, dyads by enhancing partner interaction, networks by altering group relationships, immediate environments by manipulating relationships in every day places, communities by designing them to facilitate relationships, and societies through the development of social policies designed to support social relationships (Adams and Blieszner 1993). In general, as a society, however, we tend to think of friendship as entirely voluntary and as the responsibility of the individual (Adams 1989), not as a focus for policy or practice intervention. Perhaps this way of thinking is the reason that in a fairly extensive discussion of interventions to increase successful aging, Depp et al. (2012) did not mention the manipulation of friendship or even of social relationships as a possibility. Similarly, it is not surprising that very few of the authors of the 25 studies we discuss in this chapter recommended interventions. Rather than studying national populations or even communities, the researchers who were most likely to make practical suggestions studied the immediate environments in which older adults sometimes spend time or even live, such as senior centers (Aday et al. 2012; Fitzpatrick et al. 2008), assisted living facilities (Cook 2006; Street et al. 2007), and long-term care facilities (Cook 2006). Given that staff members in such organizations and at such institutions consider their clients' well-being as their responsibility,

these studies were probably designed with interventions in mind whereas research designed to be conducted at levels more remote from the individual would be more likely to be designed to contribute to theoretical development.

Although the authors of these 25 studies including measures of concepts related to both friendship activity and happiness did not suggest interventions at other levels to enhance friendship, other friendship researchers have done so. For example, based on their findings from a study of social support in three urban areas in London, Phillips et al. (2000) recommended interventions be designed at the community level. The authors point out that policies need to acknowledge that people have lifelong friends who may be as important to them as kin, particularly when family members do not live nearby. Recognizing that social workers do not usually intervene directly into social lives, Phillips and her colleagues also recommend that social workers should be aware of the patterns of both informal and formal social support networks characteristic of a catchment area because such awareness can lead to a realization that communities have different service needs. In an article based on data from the NESTOR-LSN survey (3229 adults aged 55–89 years in the Netherlands) and from a subset of the Northern California Community Study (22 adults aged 55–91 years in the United States), Gierveld and Perlman (2006) found that the number of years since an older adult had relocated was a strong correlate of relationship duration and suggested that programs that minimized the impact of such moves, perhaps by making it easier for people to visit each other after relocation, would be helpful. One example they provided was reduced bus fares in nonpeak hours, which in the Netherlands helps people living in different areas to maintain relationships.

Conclusions

When Rebecca Adams met with Emeritus Professor Robert Havighurst in the 1970's to discuss her dissertation research on the role of friendship among elderly women (Adams 1983), he struck her as a humble man, as he expressed disbelief that anyone who had been retired as long as he had would have something to contribute. Ironically, in the third age of her own academic career, by rereading the editorial (Havighurst 1961) that originally led her to contact him while she was in graduate school, she has been reminded that it is his vision that gerontologists have been working to achieve for more than 50 years.

In this chapter, we have examined the research related to only one of the many potential lines of investigation implied in his editorial. Indeed, as Activity Theory predicted so many years ago, friendship and happiness are positively related, and thus the role of friendship provides a viable alternative to adults who have experienced role losses associated with aging.

The work of friendship researchers to help fulfill Havighurst's vision is not finished, however. Despite his role in the development of theories of successful aging, his ultimate goal for the science of gerontology was applied—to add life to the years during the third age, or in other words, to help people to enjoy and get satisfaction from life. Unlike some more contemporary scholars, he appreciated that theory, research, and practice are synergistic and inform each other. He observed that in order to provide good advice to individuals and society, "it is essential that gerontology have a theory of successful aging" (p. 8). He further observed that a choice between Activity Theory and Disengagement Theory should be based on evidence about whether "older

people who remain fully engaged are more or less successful than those who are disengaged" (p. 9). All that was required, he said, was "an operational definition of successful aging and a method of measure the degree to which people fit this definition" (p. 9). From the current vantage point five decades later, his comment that "this has not proved easy" seems like an understatement (p. 9). Although Disengagement Theory was dismissed long before most of the research on successful aging was conducted, gerontologists continue to refine the operational definition of successful aging, and our understanding of the forces that affect the well-being of older adults continues to evolve.

Gerontologists focusing on many other aspects of successful aging have recommended, designed, and implemented interventions into the aging process at all levels, but friendship researchers have been more likely to recommend interventions into the immediate social environments in which older adults live than at levels more remote from the individual. It is very clear in his editorial by his focus on societal responsibility that Havighurst would think that friendship researchers still have work to do in the area of national social policy. In order to contribute to the achievement of his vision and more specifically to the development of policies that would support successful aging throughout society, gerontologists must encourage interventions to support opportunities for older adults to continue or increase their participation in the friendship role as they age. For this reason, large, national probability samples need to be studied over a sufficiently long period of time to ensure that we understand the relationships among aging, friendship activity, and happiness, and therefore, any advice we give based on the available evidence is more likely to be good.

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