

Behavioral Science at the National Institute on Aging

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The National Institute on Aging (NIA) used the APS 20th Annual Convention as an opportunity to showcase the best of its behavioral science portfolio and to spread the word that the portfolio is expanding. The message was clear: behavioral science investigators should look to NIA for research support.

A workshop featured NIA's brightest stars, many of whom are renowned psychological science researchers. APS President John Cacioppo and Past President Robert Levenson introduced the program, describing how NIA has had a remarkable influence on their careers as well as those of so many researchers, new and old.

The morning program presented several "how-to" sessions, such as a session on how to write a successful aging grant application given by APS Charter Member and Fellow Fredda Blanchard-Fields, Georgia Institute of Technology, and a presentation about special considerations when neuroimaging the aging brain given by Scott Huettel, Duke University. A panel on opportunities for secondary analyses featured APS Charter Member and Fellow John McArdle, University of Southern California; APS Fellow Carol Ryff, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Burton Singer, Princeton University; David Weir, University of Michigan; and sociologist Linda Waite, University of Chicago. These scientists talked about a variety of longitudinal studies they've been involved with that have yielded incredibly rich databases, and with NIA support these studies are available to researchers interested in asking new questions.

In the afternoon, an extraordinary slate of scientists, including Cacioppo and Levenson, as well as convention Keynote Speaker Shelley Taylor and Bring the Family Speaker Laura Carstensen, gave brief overviews of their research programs, all of which were established with NIA support. The topics ranged from integrative research in social and personality psychology of aging, to advances in cognitive aging research, to neuroeconomics and its intersection with psychology.

We all know that many psychological theories are based on experiments conducted with the same age group: college students. It's imperative that we test these theories with older adults, so traditional areas of psychology need to be recast in the lifespan perspective to see if they still hold true, and if not, we must determine how aging changes behavior. For example, Levenson's work has shown that although emotions are relatively spared from the effects of aging, they're highly vulnerable to neurological diseases. And Carstensen, via her socioemotional selectivity theory, has demonstrated that the perception of remaining time in one's life colors everything from financial choices to emotional reactivity.

Lively discussion among the panelists, the audience, and the NIA officials — Richard Suzman, the director of the Behavioral and Social Research division at NIA, as well as program officers Lis Nielsen and Jonathan King — brought to light issues of interdisciplinary research within the aging framework,

how basic behavioral researchers have much to bring to the neuroscience and genetics tables, and the future promise of interventions to delay the onset of cognitive aging. Panelists also discussed an interesting and rather unexplored avenue that could be fruitful for lifespan research: corporations. More and more businesses are welcoming behavioral scientists, as they become increasingly eager to maintain the well-being of their employees.

This is certainly food for thought for investigators wanting to reach beyond the typical college student subject pool, and NIA could be a great place to start. If you're interested in applying to NIA for funding, contact the Division of Behavioral and Social Research (DBSR) at NIA or

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/ResearchInformation/ExtramuralPrograms/BehavioralAndSocialResearch/>. ?