

Advantages of Growing Older
In Perspective
1982

The most obvious advantage of growing older is, of course, the avoidance of the very unpleasant alternative--not growing older. For men in our culture growing older has always had positive aspects, while for women middle and old age have been periods signaling the end of their usefulness, attractiveness, and worth. We are beginning to see some shifts in cultural attitudes toward the aging process, as more and more women enter the labor force and find their identity, at least in part, in careers previously closed to them.

The phenomenon sometimes referred to as "the graying of America" has allowed both men and women to reflect upon and enjoy the rewards of their later years. For many these rewards are financial. Careers solidify in the middle years, salaries and wages are at or near their peak, and a greater proportion of the paycheck is available for luxuries. Many of those fortunate enough to have purchased a house when the teens referred to adolescents and not to interest rates, are now in the position of having mortgages paid off or nearly so.

As children grow up and become financially independent, their parents gain both economic and emotional freedom. No longer responsible for the care and feeding of the next generation, parents are now able to indulge in postponed pleasures--travel, study, each other.

If the accretion of years has brought with it the acquisition of wisdom, growing older can also mean freedom from many of the culture's constraints. The older person who has examined his or her values is often in a better position, both psychologically and financially, to live by those values. It becomes easier to refuse to do things that violate one's sense of purpose, while having available a store of energy and know-how to invest in activities that appear to be fruitful. Many older Americans report increased satisfaction with their lives as they take advantage of the opportunities proffered by maturity.