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Gene D. Cohen Papers

1946-2009

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A pioneer in geriatric psychiatry with a polymathic imagination, Gene D. Cohen was born in Brockton, Mass., in 1944, and educated at Harvard, Georgetown University School of Medicine (1970), and the Union Institute (PhD, Gerontology). Cohen began

his career with the U.S. Public Health Service out of medical school, and from the outset, set a novel course in his research, becoming one of the first psychiatrists to specialize in study of the impact of aging on the brain and Alzheimer's disease. Recognized for administrative prowess as well as the originality of his scholarship, he was selected as the first chief of the Center on Aging at the National Institute of Mental Health (1975-1988), and went on to leadership positions at the National Institute on Aging (NIH) and in the profession more generally. In 1994, he left government employment to found the Center on Aging, Health, and Humanities at George Washington University. The impact of Cohen's research was felt widely and catalyzed a change in the field from viewing aging as a disease to recognizing the creative potential of the older mind. His demonstration of the health benefits to older people of engagement in the arts made him one of the intellectual architects of the field of Creative Aging. The author of more than 150 articles and monographs, he earned numerous awards for his work, including the highest award bestowed by the U.S. Public Health Service, the Distinguished Service Medal. Cohen died of metastatic prostate cancer at the age of 65 in Nov. 2009, leaving his wife, Wendy Miller, two children, and four grandchildren.

A significant collection for study of the growth of geriatric psychiatry and the field of creative aging, the collection includes materials from throughout Gene Cohen's pathbreaking career. The collection offers insight into the development of gerontological research particularly during Cohen's years at the NIMH and NIH. In addition to an extensive set of publications by and about Cohen, the collection includes background materials for Cohen's books *The Creative Age*, *The Mature Mind*, and *Sky Above Clouds*, and a significant corpus relating to some of his major research projects. Finally, the collection includes a selection of videotapes of interviews with Cohen, including several presentations and talks.

Background on Gene D. Cohen

A pioneer in geriatric psychiatry with a polymathic imagination, Gene D. Cohen was born on September 28, 1944 in Brockton, Massachusetts, where his father ran a hardware store. He graduated cum laude from Harvard with a degree in art history in 1966, received a medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine in 1970, and then earned a PhD in Gerontology at the Union Institute in 1981. Cohen began his career with the U.S. Public Health Service out of medical school. From the outset, he set a novel course in his research, becoming one of the first psychiatrists to specialize in the study of the impact of aging on the brain and Alzheimer's disease. Recognized for administrative process as well as the originality of his scholarship, he was selected as the first chief of the Center on Aging at the National Institute of Mental Health (1975-1988) and went on to leadership positions at the National Institute on Aging at NIH. In 1994, he left government employment to found the Center on Aging, Health, and Humanities at George Washington University.

Cohen was the founding editor of two journals, *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* and *International Psychogeriatrics*. He additionally was president of the Gerontological Society of America from 1996-1997 and served as Chairman of the Clinical Medicine section. Other positions included those of Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown and Chairman of the Council on Aging of the American Psychiatric Association. In addition to founding the center, Dr. Cohen served as founding director of the Washington, D.C. Center on Aging, a think tank. He was elected to the Board of Directors of The American Geriatrics Society and served as Chairman of the Committee on Aging of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry.

The impact of Cohen's research was felt widely and catalyzed a change in the field from viewing aging as a disease to recognizing the creative potential of the older mind. His demonstration of the health benefits to older people of engagement in the arts made him one of the intellectual architects of the field of Creative Aging. He was the project director for a study, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, which assessed the impact on older people of cultural programs provided by professional artists. Cohen was a dedicated advocate to the concept that the elderly are capable of functioning at high levels of creativity and intellectual thought. When Cohen's career began, he argued against the medical profession largely treated aging like a disease. With evidence from Cohen's research, he argued that the brain would continue creating new cells at any age so long as it was engaged in new and challenging intellectual activities.

The author of more than 150 articles and monographs, he earned numerous awards for his work, including the highest award bestowed by the U.S. Public Health Service, the Distinguished Service Medal. Both as a researcher and as a spokesman for research in gerontology — he was often a guest on television news programs and made a series of public service messages with the comedian George Burns — he was instrumental in bringing information about aging to the public. Cohen died of metastatic prostate cancer at the age of 65 in Nov. 2009, leaving his wife, Wendy Miller, two children, and four grandchildren.

Awards

Massachusetts Institute of Technology/Massachusetts State High School Science Fair, 1961. First Prize for *Aging and Oceanography—A Comparative Analysis of the Relationship of Age to Growth in Fish to Assess Ecological Conditions; and a New Method to Assess Age in Fish*.

Harvard College Honorary Scholarship for Academic Achievement, 1964.

Harvard College Fellowship in Biological Research under Nobel Laureate George Wald, Summer 1965.

Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Medical Scholarship, 1968.

Georgetown University School of Medicine Scholarship, 1968.
Georgetown University School of Medicine Award for Outstanding Achievement in Psychiatry, 1970.
Kestin Memorial Lectureship Award, Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California, 1984.
Distinguished Service Medal, U.S. Public Health Service, 1984.
Outstanding Unit Citation, U.S. Public Health Service, 1988.
Certificate of Appreciation, U.S. Surgeon General, 1988.
Outstanding Volunteer Services Certificate of Appreciation (for volunteer clinical work) from the District of Columbia's Special Programs Administration and the D.C. Department of Recreation.
Recognized in Best Doctors in America, 1988.
Recognized in *Who's Who in America* (46th Edition, 1990, and following).
Recognized in *Who's Who in the World* (10th Edition, 1991-1992, and following).
Merit Award, Combined Federal Campaign of the National Capital Area, 1991.
Outstanding Service Medal, U.S. Public Health Service, 1992.
Lifetime Science Award, Institute for Advanced Studies in Immunology & Aging, 1992.
Honorable Mention in the 1992 Blue Pencil Competition of the National Association of Government Communicators: writing category of "Feature Release or Article".
Donald P. Kent Award, Gerontological Society of America, 1994.
Baylor College of Medicine Huffington Center on Aging Distinguished Visiting Professor, 1995.
Bennett J. Cohen Memorial Lecture, University of Michigan Institute of Gerontology, 1996.
UCLA Academic Geriatric Resource Center Distinguished Professor for 1996.
Jack Weinberg Memorial Award for Geriatric Psychiatry, American Psychiatric Association, 1996.
University of South Florida Institute on Aging Distinguished Lectureship in Aging, 1998.
Certificate of Merit for Distinguished Service as Editor-in-Chief, American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, presented by the American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, 2000.
Award for "Outstanding Vision and Leadership as Editor-in-Chief, American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 1992-2001, American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, 2001.
Key to the City of El Paso, Texas. Presented by the Mayor for providing assistance in the planning of local programs on aging, 2001.
Distinguished Fellow, American Psychiatric Association, 2003.
Blair L. Sadler International Healing Arts Competition Award, First Place (Participatory Arts category), Society for the Arts in Health Care, 2003.
International Psychogeriatric Association Award for Distinguished Service to the Field of Psychogeriatrics, 2003.
Exemplary Psychiatrist Award, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), 2003.
MetLife MindAlert Lecture, American Society on Aging, 2004
Molly Mettler Award, National Council on the Aging's Health Promotion Institute's most prestigious recognition, 2006.
Distinguished Life Fellow, American Psychiatric Association, 2007.
Fielding Graduate University Creative Longevity and Wisdom Outstanding Scholar, 2008
Establishment of the Gene D. Cohen Research Award in Creativity & Aging—an endowed award sponsored by the National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA) and the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) for recipients making outstanding contributions that advance research and its application in the field of Creativity and Aging, 2009.
Hall of Fame induction. American Society of Aging (ASA)/ National Council on Aging (NCOA), 2010.

Scope of collection

A significant collection for study of the growth of geriatric psychiatry and the field of creative aging, the collection includes materials from throughout Gene Cohen's pathbreaking career. The collection offers insight into the development of gerontological research particularly during Cohen's years at the NIMH and NIH. In addition to an extensive set of publications by and about Cohen, the collection includes background materials for Cohen's books *The Creative Age*, *The Mature Mind*, and *Sky Above Clouds*, and a significant corpus relating to some of his major research projects. Finally, the collection includes a selection of videotapes of interviews with Cohen, including several presentations and talks.

Series descriptions

Series 1: Biographical

Series 1 includes a biographical overview of school records, awards, and photographs of Gene Cohen. It also includes Cohen's resumes and curriculum vitae over the years. The series captures a span of 1952-2009, with the bulk occurring from 1952-1988. Cohen's memorial service is documented in 2009. This series is organized chronologically.

Series 2: Research and Grants

This series includes research and grant documentation of Cohen's longitudinal studies such as Spy Kids, Retirement, and Boomers. Within response data, there is also preliminary data, collaboration with organizations, and both documented

conceptualization and operationalization of studies. Institutional Review Board Approval is also outlined for almost every documented study Cohen organized. This series is organized chronologically.

Series 3: Publications and Press

The publications and press series contains outlines of a multitude of talks Gene Cohen gave for many universities and organizations. Additionally, copies of Cohen's published articles are found within this series. News media outlines, including the PBS coverage of *Creative Aging*, are shown with full written documentation. This series is organized chronologically.

Series 4: Audiovisual Materials

In addition to the written documentation of news media coverage of Gene Cohen's research, there are CDs, VHS, reel-to-reels, and record copies of such coverage. This series also includes home videos from the science fair and audio files of Cohen's publications such as *Mature Mind* and *Creative Aging*. In this series everything but the VHS tapes are organized alphabetically.

Series 5: Books

The collection contains 73 books including an almost complete collection of *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* with 9 volumes. The series also contains personal copies of Gene Cohen's published books such as *The Creative Age*, *Sky Above Clouds*, and *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*. This series is organized alphabetically.

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VHS: Master Love
1999 Jul 20
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VHS: Ms. Alfred and Maybelle Thomas
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1999 Sept 24
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VHS: Health Week
1999 Jun 17
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VHS: CBS Health Watch Game
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VHS: Gene Cohen Appearance on Weekend Today in New York
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VHS: Ohio Department of Aging
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2016

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