



Forming a Maturing and Older Adult: How Formative Psychology and Practice is Applied in a Group for Maturing and Older Adults

By Carola Butschied, Esq.

After more than 20 years of professional study and personal experience with Stanley Keleman, I feel his Formative approach deep in my bones, in my style of living, and in the process of my teaching. It has been a rich and rewarding experience to represent his work in Europe where I co-founded and direct the "Institut für Formative Psychologie" in Solingen, Germany. Recently I participated in Stanley's 2014 Professional Seminar in Berkeley, California, and again I realize how lucky I have been to meet him and to have the chance to learn with him, and how much he has enriched my life in all its layers.

It is a special pleasure and satisfaction for me to share the knowledge and experiences of Formative Psychology with clients and colleagues who are sitting in the same 'boat' with me as we deal with challenges of getting older. At the Institute in Solingen we have an ongoing group, "The adventure of getting older". We explore somatically and Formatively what it means to get older. We use Stanley's Formative method to learn about our individual process of becoming and being an older adult, and we choose specific exercises to explore this stage of living. The enthusiasm for learning goes on and on because Formative Psychology gives a future approach and brings an optimism about living whatever age we inhabit.

Members of the group share an interest in finding alternatives to

society's stereotypes of what it means to be aging and older; alternatives that include being vital and responsive without trying to remain 'youthful' and endlessly pursue a lifestyle of a previous stage of living. We explore new perspectives and a psychology based in how we are embodied and how we can create our own personal ways behaving and feeling appropriate to our age. Learning to create new personal experiences is both empowering and a great adventure.

The premise of the group is that neither society nor instinct prepares us for older age. Society views changes that come with the process of getting older as 'less', as loss or diminishment. Instinct may tell us to conserve ourselves by muting excitement and limiting muscle movement, but maturity and old age

do not necessarily mean a lessening of excitement or acting. As each stage of living brings changing patterns of excitement so does aging but this is not the same as 'less'. Rather it is forming the next stage of our embodiment. The participants in our programs come to understand that a vital and satisfying life means influencing their patterns of excitement, learning to recognize them and to voluntarily differentiate them. From Stanley's Formative perspective it is our life task to learn to manage our excitement patterns and create a personal life. A satisfying life does not just somehow happen. It needs a vision, coming from our own embodiment, and it needs commitment and a practice. We have the choice to form our life with voluntary effort, as best as we can, or we will be formed by other forces.



Doing a somatic exercise in a slow measured way creates a relationship within ourselves that we experience as self-intimacy. Self-intimacy is an experiential knowing of subjective experience that we can recognize and repeat. 'Slow' means to take the time to make distinctions in a pattern of action. Slowing the trajectory of a behavior is self-created behavior, which allows a person to make connections inside themselves; it allows the soma to interact with itself and initiates a process of creating a new dimension. From there we have the choice to create an "unhurried life", we form a subjectivity, an interiority that give values and meaning to our lives.

In the older adult group, we seek to explore our own internal patterns such as: Is there something in me - a rigidity, a porosity, a pulsation, a feeling, a thought - that I experience as an intruder to my established identity? How do I protect myself against feelings or behaviors I don't want or that I experience as threatening? How do I experience uncertainty or deal with being alone? How do I organize how I want to be seen in the world?

We have found particularly useful the exercises of voluntary muscular effort dealing with the "hurry up" pattern. On the one hand, we learn to recognize our established pattern; on the other hand, we learn to recognize our pulsatory reality and that there may be a difference between 'what I want to live and what I can live'. The differentiation of established patterns of behavior and the repetition of new patterns give us a choice. We are not trapped in reproducing behavior that has been developed for past situations.

People who work with the process over time have told me things like:

"I realize, that I don't have to feel bad about or criticize my past life, it is all part of me and I use it to make the next step. I am looking forward to my coming shapes"

"I enjoy my life. I am rejoicing."

After seeing the DVD *Emotional Anatomy*, one woman said, 'That is me. I knew it already, but now I know it on a deeper level. I am this process. I feel optimistic. I am containing waves of gratitude and love. Life is good.'

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