



How to Cultivate Positive Age Beliefs | Dr. Becca Levy

[00:00:00] Guest Intro - Becca Levy

Darin: Hey, everybody, welcome to the show. This is Darin Olien. This is The Darin Olien Show. Thanks for being here. This is a doozy, but we're probably gonna unpack some stuff that you haven't thought about before. This episode comes by an incredible woman, Dr. Becca Levy, who is an award-winning professor at Yale, in psychology and public health and doctorate in psychology from Harvard, ran the National Institute of Aging, a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard. She has given tons of research and time to this idea that she helped to bring out into the world, and that is called ageism. That's right. We have deep beliefs that are creating and curbing our choices, our ideas, our culture, our people, our communities, our cities, our ideologies based around age. Do we have a healthy outlook on age in the United States? No. Someone gets old, we want to get rid of them, and put them away into a home because we don't know what to do with them. Our culture here in the western world is flipped upside down. In other cultures which we talked to with Dr. Levy about, they celebrate as one gets older and wiser and can contribute to the family, to the community. We impact this idea of ageism, which is so fascinating. It's such a great time having this conversation with Dr. Becca. She wrote this incredible book called *Breaking the Age Code*, how your age beliefs determine how long and how well you live. Yes, you will find this episode really powerful. The more you can become aware of these ideas, which are absolutely rooted in scientific vigor by her work, you will be blown away. I had an incredible time with my new friend. Listen to the incredible Dr. Becca Levy.

[00:02:15] Podcast Intro

Darin: You are listening to The Darin Olien Show. I am Darin, and it is my life's mission to find and share healthy and sustainable ways of living. In this podcast, I talk to inspiring people and professionals from around the world to uncover ways that we as humans can improve our lifestyles, strengthen our mindsets, and take better care of this beautiful planet we call home. If you're looking for motivation to take the next steps towards a happier, healthier life, then you're in the right place, and I'm stoked that you're here. So let's do this. This is my show, The Darin Olien Show.

[00:02:59] First Part of the Interview

Darin: Thank you for jumping on this. I'm so curious. There's such a cool, unique background, and going into an area that you are forging yourself around these whole beliefs around age and ageism. It's so fascinating. I'm just stoked to just straight up have this conversation. Before we get into that and your book, obviously, you got into psychology. As you were kind of unpacking the mysteriousness of us as humans through your studies, at what point did age come in and go, hey, I want to take my fellowship, I want to start diving into that, what happened and why did you kind of start going down this path?

[00:03:49] What intrigued Becca about age



Becca: I first decided that was a topic I really wanted to focus on after my first job after college. The first job that I got was in a psychiatric hospital and the only job they had was on a geriatric unit, so I really hesitated to take the job. I had studied psychology, so I wanted to do something in psychology, but I wasn't intending to do anything with older people. But I decided to try the job for two weeks just to see what it was like even though I had a lot of stereotypes, I thought it was gonna be a very depressing job, but I ended up really enjoying the job. I really enjoyed getting to know the people who were recovering and I really enjoyed this multidisciplinary perspective to understand how to improve their health. I saw a lot of resiliency that I wasn't expecting. I saw a lot of treatment and recovery and a lot of people working together to think about how biology and psychology and the mind-brain, how it all comes together in later life so that sort of sparked a lot of ideas that I really wanted to go into that area.

Darin: Wow, that's cool. What were some of those back then and we can get into what you know now? What are some of those things that were shocking when you kind of had them do a little course correction? What were some of those things that stood out?

Becca: I think I thought it was going to be just a very short term job because I would just find it too hard, too challenging, that I thought I had this misperception that older people weren't gonna be able to recover, that they weren't going to be able to benefit from therapy. Little by little, I just saw all these cases of people who had great stories to tell, had all these interesting experiences and were able to reflect back on their lives and grow in their time. I got to see a lot of sort of mental health growth during that time. Yes, there are a lot of little moments where it's like, whoa, that's really interesting that we can see these benefits in later life. Then I started to think about, could there be things in our culture in particular that can be contributing to health? If all of these factors are coming together, what about the cultural differences that might make a difference? That kind of led to a bunch of other ideas that led to my current focus on these beliefs about aging that exists in a culture?

Darin: Just to say right away so people can go check it out right now, *Breaking the Age Code*, which is such a great title, and how your age beliefs determine how long and well you've lived. That is just wildly fascinating just to contemplate. Again, I'm so fascinated with the resiliency because it's as we age, especially since you took that job, it's like at a certain point, we don't sign people off, like that's it, they're over this amount, they've got some comorbidities, they're in a home just waiting to die. It's kind of messed up. The one hand, you could flip cultures around the world and go, that's not the case. I've seen it, I've been around circles of elders in the middle of Africa and you're like, no, that's definitely not the case. They're revered, they're apart, they're supporting the children, they're participating and their wisdom. They're just oozing wisdom of life. So, maybe just touching on the culture here, what the hell are we doing? I would imagine we got it wrong. What are we doing and how can we change the culture around our aging paradigm?

[00:07:17] How do we change attitudes towards aging

Becca: Yes, that's so important. What you've said that you've noticed and in looking at these different cultures, that's exactly what sparked my interest in this topic. When I was in graduate school, I received this fellowship to go to Japan. When I was there and the goal of my fellowship was to actually try to understand why they had the longest lifespan in the



world, and I didn't really have any preconceptions of what I was going to find when I got there. But what I immediately noticed when I arrived was how differently the culture treated the older people. It was just so different from what I was used to seeing in Boston where I was living at the time where there was a lot of ageism I was observing. In Japan in contrast, I noticed that older people were treated like rock stars on television, so centenarians and supercentenarians who were celebrated on TV, and in their comic book format, and they had this national holiday celebrating older people. So I became really interested in this question, is it possible that the more positive age beliefs that existed or that do exist in Japan, could those actually correspond to their survival advantage or having this really long lifespan? That actually led to questions, a set of ideas that I explored in studies going forward, and boundaryless support for that?

Darin: The whole idea of aging, of course, we want to crack that open and go, what's the fountain of youth, what's all that stuff, but it's a web. We want to reduce things down and of course, the Blue Zones and all of that stuff, what are people eating, what are they doing, but I think there's something that you're getting into here that it seems more subtle, but it also seems, from my perspective, just in this intuitive hit right now. It actually feels more powerful than almost anything. Is that correct?

Becca: Yes, it seems like it's very subtle, but there are these messages everywhere. We know children as young as three have already taken in these age beliefs of other cultures and then they're reinforced over time. And often, we don't even know that we have these age beliefs because they can operate without our awareness. Unconsciously, we can take them in, and children take them on before they're relevant to who they are. They're not yet older people, those are their future selves, so there's no need to kind of resist them only if they're presented with a negative message. One of the earliest messages that I remember receiving was about aging was when I was a kid, I was told the story of Hansel and Gretel. I don't know if you were told that one, but it's just like this image of this older woman who wants to eat children and she's basically a cannibal. I remember thinking that this is a really scary image and why is it that that's the story that we tell our children. But if you look in other cultures, they have very different kinds of stories that they're telling their children. So there are these messages that are very sort of baked into our culture, but we can recognize them and overcome them. They're not set in stone, they are things that we can actively shift.

Darin: But unless you look at them, you can't do anything about it unless they come out from under the subconscious and come to a place where we can consciously unpack them and look at them. We all know if we don't look at something, it doesn't go away and in fact, it probably gets worse and bigger and not good for anybody. Maybe just unpacking a little bit like the definitions here. You use the term ageism, and then let's start maybe percolating on some of the other kinds of beliefs that are embedded into our American culture here, and maybe people can start to walk away from this episode going shit, I'm walking around. But I think this is a very important thing that we need to shed light on. So what are some of the definitions of ageism, and how we can start to look at this different?

[00:11:05] What exactly is agism?

Becca: The person who first coined this is a psychiatrist named Robert Butler, and he defined ageism as discrimination against people based on being older, and simply on their



age denying them opportunities, and it can include these negative age beliefs. He actually first coined the term when he noticed a housing complex in DC where the residents decided that they didn't want older people to move into the housing complex. So, he tried to come up with a term to describe how is it that they can deny opportunities to people just because they're older. We know since then, ageism can operate as we talked about unconsciously and implicitly, and we also know that it can exist structurally. It can exist in sort of the power structures of society. The World Health Organization recently came out with this statement that because ageism is so built into our structure, it's one of the least understood, least recognized forms of prejudice that exist today, and one of the most socially condoned, but I think what's really important is that we can become cognizant of it. We can become aware of it. There are skills that we can take that will increase our awareness and allow us to strengthen the positive age beliefs. I think there is this hopeful message, and there are skills that we can learn at any age.

Darin: So what are some of those things that we can start to play with here that can percolate some of this stuff for people to go like, I didn't even realize that I was carrying that.

Becca: Exactly. I think one of the most powerful things that we can do is to increase our awareness. There are two parts to this. One is to increase our own awareness, how we think about our own age beliefs, and also increase our awareness of the age beliefs and the messages about aging that we encounter all around us. In the book, *Breaking the Age Code*, I present about 15 or so evidence-based methods that people can use to strengthen positive age beliefs, and reduce negative age beliefs. But one of the ones that I think is most powerful that people can start to do right away is something I call "age bleep journaling," which involves just for one week, writing down any portrayal of aging that you've come across. It could be a show that you're watching on Netflix, it could be in a conversation you're having with somebody in a coffee shop, it can be a sign that you see at the airport. This is something about aging, so it could be just about anything. So whenever you see any portrayal of aging, write it down, and then also write down whether it's a positive portrayal or a negative portrayal. If it's a negative portrayal, take a moment and think, is there another message, another portrayal of this older person that could have been presented? So there's this cranky older man on a television show, could that have been a different kind of image? Could it have actually been somebody who was giving advice to the grandchildren in that show? So, taking a moment to question some of the negative beliefs. Then also notice when they're absent. There are many kinds of conversations and things that we see that don't include older people. Also noticing omissions of older people's important because we know that that can lead to sort of marginalization and exclusion of older people.

Darin: That's huge. Just as you bring up that example, I think of those series of movies of the grumpy old man. Just as you said that, of course, it comes from my unconscious to my consciousness and says, so there's this idea that when all men get old that they're somehow grumpy. Then we have a bunch of movies about them, and then they're portrayed as grumpy. What the hell are we missing as a result of this discriminatory kind of view that we're not getting in this culture? My gosh, Japan and those kinds of cultures where they're racing the wisdom. How did we survive even as cultures when we pass down wisdom? One can make an argument, in this society, we're not making the wisest choices. What do you think if you were a policymaker, and maybe not even saying that but what can we do to extract and



support not only the support of humans that are getting older but the support of this incredible vastness of wisdom that they've had while just living?

Becca: Another thing that I suggest in *Breaking the Age Code*, not only to increase our awareness, but I suggest developing what I call a portfolio of a diverse set of positive images or positive beliefs about aging. I think we all have been exposed to some great older people. It's great to also think about they can have different qualities that you admire. It's particularly good to come up with a set of examples that maybe you have different qualities that you would like to strengthen in yourself. So one person that you may have in your portfolio is an older relative who had a really good sense of humor, and somebody else could be a historical figure that you think had a great work ethic or a sense of social justice you would really like to strengthen or connect to. I think we all have those images that we can draw on. I think in some cultures, there may be put into the forefront a little bit more clearly than others, but I think we all have them and that's actually one of the hopeful things I found in my research is that when I ask people what are the first five words or phrases that come to mind, which is one of the questions that I use in my research to help people to tell me what their beliefs about aging are, and most people will come up with negative beliefs first. But after the first couple that tends to be more negative, they tend to come up with some positive images or positive beliefs as well. I think that we have them in our minds, it's just a matter of strengthening them and bringing them to the forefront, and finding them as sources of inspiration.

[00:16:55] Beekeeper's Naturals Ad

Darin: Bees harness some incredible benefits to the environment and to our health. Bees are truly fascinating and incredible little insects. Beekeeper's Naturals are a proud advocate for these bees in so many ways, and their sustainable source products offer real safe health solutions derived straight from the hive. Through the power of natural ingredients like bee propolis extract, royal jelly, raw bee pollen, Beekeeper's products provide similar results to what you'd find in your local pharmacy, that's right, but don't force you to compromise your values. Their products undergo third-party testing to make sure that they're free of these modern day additives, artificial colors preservatives, fillers, gluten, GMOs and the dangerous pesticides that are everywhere as well as refined sugars. I use their bee propolis throat spray every morning to set me up throughout my day. I love it because it supports my overall health as well as soothing my throat because I am definitely talking a lot when I'm recording podcasts like this. I am completely plant-based and I support insects and animals and everything else, and so I really spent time understanding their harvest methods and how they're actually allowing the bees to thrive better as a result of their caretaking. Beekeeper's main mission is to save the bees. They even donate 10% of their profits to honey bee research, and that is awesome. To improve your health today, Beekeeper's Naturals is offering my listeners 25% off by going to beekeepersnaturals.com/darin or enter code, D-A-R-I-N at the checkout.

[00:19:10] Second Part of the Interview

Darin: When asked a question, which is why I'm so excited that we're having this conversation when you're actually asked what are your beliefs about your own aging, what is



the most surprising? What are the themes that always seem to come up, especially in this I guess kind of society that you find?

[00:19:30] Surprising beliefs about aging

Becca: Perhaps the most common negative age belief that comes up in my research is the idea that all cognition declines in all older people. I think that comes up in a lot of different ways in messages that we get in advertisements, the different in popular culture in different ways, but we know from the science that this doesn't match the results. We know that there are lots of different types of memory and some types of memory stay the same like the ability to remember how to write a bike, procedural memory, and other types of memory actually seem to improve in later life or types of cognition get stronger in later life, such as the skill-solving conflicts tend to get better in later life. Also, the skill, it's called metacognition, or thinking about thinking, tends to get better in later life. There are these skills that get better. Even in the types of cognition that we think that people in science think decline in later life, I've found in my research that if we promote the positive age beliefs that even those types of cognition can improve. There's just a lot of variability. The other thing that was fun in writing the book was I got to talk to people who kind of represented different ideas and the science. One of the favorite people that I talked to was this 84-year-old man, who's an actor, John, who took on the memory task of trying to memorize a 60,000-word poem. He actually did this, and then he performed it over a couple of days. One of the things actually that really stood out to me and talking to him is that he had his own positive age belief that he drew on. When he was taking on this memory task, he thought of this cellist who played beautiful music and his 80s and 90s. That image inspired him and motivated him to take on this memory task.

Darin: You are bringing up so many memories just having this conversation. It's astonishing. I can't even keep up. Literally, I'm seeing my grandmother who passed at 94, played the piano until she was 93. I remember her passing on this knowledge of feeding Native Americans in South Dakota when she was seven, born in 1901. Again, that's the thing that I think is so powerful in the positive side of aging. There's so much to be gained and not brush people off. It's horrifying. I believe this, I don't know about you, but I really believe that sitting down with almost anyone, not only is there wisdom, there's a spirit, there's a soul, there's a person there that has gained and garnered something, that we all have this autonomy that we're going through this fantastical blue planet flying around trying to figure it out. I think there's amazing wisdom that we're losing, plain and simple. So here's the other tsunami, we have this tsunami of ill health, a tsunami of modern-day world that certainly made turning on the faucet and turning on lights and having controlled environments and cars and everything else. Certainly made conveniences but at the same time we have inflammatory foods, we have things that are forcing us to not age well. So, where's the cross-section between having a positive age outlook, as it relates to the intersection of what we can do to our health? How are we affecting ourselves in aging when we have these negative belief patterns that we're taking on, and how can we then improve that, and maybe then it kind of helps this entire web moving forward?

Becca: I think you're definitely getting at something really important. There is this kind of snowball effect. I think once we can shift our beliefs about decline to beliefs about thriving so we can shift from these negative age beliefs to more positive age beliefs, we have found in



our research that that can actually be this sort of snowball effect. It can lead to improvement in age beliefs, it can lead to improvement in different kinds of mechanisms, like improved health behaviors, reduced stress levels, and sort of changes even in physiological markers, such as cortisol levels, and those, in turn, can lead to improvements in health outcomes. When we see improvements in health outcomes that can circle back. When older people are becoming more vibrant and having more opportunities that can improve the beliefs about aging in the culture, and that in turn can lead to further health benefits. I think you're really getting at something that there's this back and forth between things that are happening in the culture and these age beliefs and then our health.

Darin: What are some of the shocking or interesting studies you've seen and changing a belief pattern as it relates to straight up is that lowering cortisol inflammation that is sprinting us towards Alzheimer's, dementia, Parkinson's, you name it? Have you seen strong correlations as it relates to things like that?

Becca: In my research, I've looked at a range of different kinds of health outcomes. I have found evidence that people who've taken in more positive age beliefs have a lower risk of developing dementia, have a lower risk of showing some of the brain changes. It tend to show less decline in hippocampal volume, which is the part of the brain that we use to form memories. We see people who've taken more positive age beliefs have better mental health outcomes. They have a lower risk of developing depression and anxiety. Then we've also seen that those who've taken positive age beliefs tend to have some better physical health outcomes such as balance and functional health, and recovery after somebody's had disability, so yes. I think because the age beliefs themselves act as a lens to, sort of, we call it an upstream factor. In the book, I talked about how there are upstream factors and downstream factors. So age beliefs are upstream factors that we take in from society and that can have a range of impacts.

Darin: Positive mental outlook, I don't know why we don't use that medicine more often for anything. Again, I think your point is we have to allow these things, we have to ask the right questions, and we have to allow ourselves to see that which we haven't been able or willing to see because culturally, this is just what I do, this is just who I am. And yet it's shocking to me, moving out of Minnesota years ago, that sometimes I come back and the age that has fallen upon friends that I'm exactly the same age with. I've heard a 35-year-old say things, well, 35, and I thought he was kidding, like it was a small tat. That is crazy to me. How many times have you heard people say, well, you know I am 50, I am 40, that's what it's like when you're 70. Whatever the hell the story is, it's like, wow, you just bought into this crazy idea and then now, what is that idea having on you?

Becca: That's a great observation. I think that's something that's really key, this idea of blaming age itself for problems, rather than thinking about all the other factors that might be going into whatever it is. Some of those we could probably change or improve, but by this kind of immediate blame on age that can lead people to sort of feel a sense of resignation and feel kind of dismissed. That's actually in the book, I present this three-part method. The first is actually to raise awareness, and the second is actually to shift blame. Exactly what you're talking about is becoming aware of how we think about the causes of things when we say, yeah, well, it's because this person is 85 that they're having this problem, but there could be so many reasons that go into any kind of problem, including ageism. So I think



taking that moment and thinking, could there be other things that are going on? Could there be some cultural things that I need to become aware of? It can be really key.

Darin: It's a little flippant for us to reduce things down and we do it all the time. Our brains want to reduce everything, well, it's this molecule, it's this thing, it's this because I did that, and it's almost impossible unless we say, hey, this arsenic, that's gonna kill me. But really, we're trying to do that all the time. What I think of is this falling into this victimization side of things. It's like, I'm 70, and this is what 70-year-old people do, I'm 80, I'm 30, whatever it is, or it's also the reverse. These poor college kids coming out of school and like, I should know what I want to do for the rest of my life, right? It's like, no, you don't. It's okay, take a breath, breathe in life, go make some mistakes. It goes both ways. Then we put this pressure on all of us, and then we're trying to sprint away from aging, but at the same time, the beliefs we're having going against us are doing push-ups in the parking lot. I'm just so excited about this topic. It's just so cool because it is bringing up a lot of stuff, I think positive stuff for me around. Then what do you think if you could construct a way, and people listening right now going, what does it look like to have positive or beneficial or successful age? What does that look like? What could one do coming from this conversation guarantee that people are going boom, like whoa, I've never heard this. Why haven't I because I know exactly what she's saying in terms of like, intuitively, you know, just like what's going on with me. There are 12,000 stories and experiences coming into my brain just having this conversation. So what is success in this area and how could people aside from definitely reading your book, so what does that look like? What would you do to create more success around us?

[00:29:50] What do positive age beliefs look like?

Becca: That's a great question. It's exciting that it's bringing different memories but one example of successful aging, I found out about in writing the book is actually an example from Zimbabwe. I had the opportunity to learn about this great model called the friendship bench, which is actually grandmothers who come together and they meet people on these benches in their community of all different ages, and they try to help them with different problems that they come to them with. To me, it's just a really nice example of successful aging because the culture really values these older women, and that motivates them to take on this role of trying to improve mental health in their community. But then also by taking on this role of being kind of mentors to people who are having challenges and really listening to them and sharing stories with them in this sort of safe space, they improve the mental health of the person that they're talking to, but they also improve their own health. So there have been some great studies of the grandmothers themselves. By taking on this positive age belief role, they improve their own health, and then that in turn validates the beliefs of the community. I really think there can be this back-and-forth relationship between the positive beliefs about aging and the role of the older people integrated into society and that further elevating their beliefs about aging, which can lead to health benefits. So there are some really good examples out there that we could think about.

[00:31:22] Bite Toothpaste Ad

Darin: Okay, let's talk about toothpaste. Most of us are still using toothpaste in tubes, and they're sitting in landfills for years. Not to mention, there is a ton of harmful chemicals, artificial flavors, and preservatives that are found in these tubes that you're putting in your



mouth. Ingredients like sulfates, palm oil, and glycerin, and you're swallowing little bits of this all the time. Do you know a toothpaste doesn't contain these ingredients, Bite toothpaste. Their toothpaste, Bites, are made from completely clean ingredients, and they come in refillable containers that make it really easy for you to take care of your teeth, while also taking care of the planet. Your refills are delivered in compostable pouches. And trust me, once you start on the Bite toothpaste, you'll be ordering the refills. I guarantee it. I know I won't be going back to the conventional toothpaste tubes. No way. Using bites toothpaste tablets is so easy and honestly, it's kind of fun because you crunch down on them as thinking that they're a little mints. I just bite down and the tablets turn into the unnecessary foam that we need and then you just go at it and it leaves your mouth feeling incredibly fresh. Bite also offers plastic-free alternatives for everything in your bathroom sink. That's right, from toothpaste, to mouthwash, to toothbrushes and deodorant. You can now cut out the harmful and harsh chemicals and plastic waste all from this one company. To try Bite today, they're offering my listeners 20% off your first order. Go to trybite.com/darin or use code DARIN at the checkout to claim this great deal. That's trybite.com/darin.

[00:33:37] Third Part of the Interview

Darin: It's different than parents. There's a certain level kids aren't going to listen. So you have this kind of other group or other mentors that are wise that they can go to that they can trust. Then when I think of the teenagers, all of us as teenagers, teenagers now, whatever it is, you're definitely not going to listen to your parents. How much do we need that right now more than ever? We need the support and that support of networks. How cool would that be if you could set up those networks? Again, the breaking down of those barriers of those old people over there just getting ready to die, and you're creating an incubator of connection and not just a flippant field trip, it is a consistent connecting point so that not only can the kids benefit, but now the older generation has a sense of purpose that is truly contributing and not just thrown away. How the hell can we set that up? How could you set that up? What are some ideas?

[00:34:45] What is age segregation and how can we prevent it?

Becca: I think you're getting at something that's really key. We know in our country, we've gone from being one of the most age-integrated countries in the world to one of the most age-segregated countries in the world, but I think we can reverse that. One thing I think we can do in our everyday life is if you think about who are your closest friends, like say you come up with your five closest friends, and then think about how old are they like, what are their ages. I think for most people like myself included, a lot of those people are pretty close to one's own age. Most of my close friends when I immediately think about it are within a few years of my age. So if that's the case, that's kind of a call for thinking about, well, how can I strengthen some of the ties to people who are different generations because we know intergenerational contact can be a great way to also benefit and strengthen positive age beliefs. I think often people have activities that could be pretty intergenerational, like whether it's running or bicycling or pottery or book club. There often are things that people already are interested in that could be a way to kind of bring the generations together.

Darin: Certainly just so the grandparents connecting back with their grandkids and things like that and making that a point. That's certainly a start. I remember an interview actually, that's



another memory that pops in my head of Prints. Yeah, random. They asked him well, how old are you or when your birthday was or whatever, and he didn't answer. I said I only had one birthday, the day I was born, and he didn't celebrate his birthday after that. Cheeky but you knew it was kind of true to him, he said, why do you think I still look good? It's interesting. Have you thought of that, how we tie age because of this calendar thing and then we drum up I'm 30, I'm 40, I'm 50, I'm 60, I'm 70, oh, 50, oh, 60, oh, 70? Then even then the society itself well, 60 is the new 40, all this stuff. But what are your thoughts on that calendar kind of idea of age?

Becca: That's a good question. Age is interesting because there's no biomarker, there are no single tests that we can take to know somebody's age. We're not like trees that have rings that you can count to know how many years somebody's been on the planet. It's really something that has all these factors that go into it. We know that only about 25% of aging health is due to our genetics, and there's 75% that are due to all these other factors, including psychological and environmental factors. One of the ones that seem really important is age beliefs, which is what I have been studying. But in terms of your question about kind of the different ages and every age has got things to celebrate and challenges. So I don't think there's anything about a particular age that should be distressing, or we should be celebrated more than others. I mean, probably every age should be celebrated. I think some cultures that value again, actually see this later celebration, these later birthdays is something to really mark in a wonderful way. There certainly are people in our country that do celebrate how these big blowups as they get older. I think there's nothing about actually counting that is good or bad, it should just kind of be something that we do that is just part of the lifecycle part of just getting older and phase passing.

Darin: For me personally, the barometer I use on birthdays regardless of kind of age really is am I on the path that I truly love. So every time that birthday comes around, it's a self-assessment of something I really practice daily in a meditative or whatever. That to me, I think when you have a midlife crisis or things like that when people are working for a certain thing under some sort of constraint of society pressure rather than what you truly want. That's where I think age really slaps them in the face because they've been doing something that they may not feel like that is their calling or their passion, but they're just doing it for a paycheck. Now, listen, we all need to work for a paycheck at certain periods of our life. Now, there's nothing wrong with that at all. God forbid, I've made a lot of mistakes and things with my hands. But if you're on the path of passion and looking for that stuff that seems to play a role in the contribution of how fast we age, or however. I don't know if you talk to Dr. Valter Longo, he's a longevity researcher, amazing guy and of course, certain level of calorie restriction is great and keeping the protein levels low. So we can start to quantify things. Certainly, I've actually met him in Sardinia, and I actually with him, which is so funny. We're having this conversation because I realize it's always been something kind of weirdly important to me, I was sitting down with a 100-year-old woman. She was 101, I think. I was astonished at this point and this was weird now that I think about it, I assumed she was married at some point in her life. I said, "When did your husband pass away?" And she goes, "Oh, I never was married." I was like, "Really?" I go, "Can I ask why?" And she goes, "I didn't think about it." I was like, what? What she said was, she was a nurse most of her life, taking care of people kind of serving a purpose, and just didn't ever really stopped to think that she needed to fill something up. My mind was blown. I was like, wow. For a woman at that age to



not feel that pressure, to feel like she needed to do that was just I thought phenomenal, life altering moment for me. If you were to give a percentage of how influential your outlook on age was, what do you think that would contribute, genetics and what we're doing and our environmental factors and all of that stuff, what would you prescribe it as?

Becca: Every outcome has a slightly different association or different relationship, but in my research that I described in the book, I have different types of methods that we look at. Sometimes, I will do an experimental study where I randomly assign people to different types of age beliefs. Sometimes I've been able to look at people cross-culturally. So comparing age beliefs in cultures that value, that have more positive age beliefs to cultures, that have more negative age beliefs, have more ageism in their everyday lives. Then the other way that I've looked at this question is over time. I've been able to work with some datasets of people who've been interviewed a long time ago. Then I've been able to match their age beliefs to health outcomes many years later including one study that I did with the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging. In that study, what was quite helpful, quite interesting was that people as young as 18 or 20 were asked about their age beliefs decades ago. The investigators had taken a number of health outcomes, including the likelihood of having a cardiovascular event. What we found is that those who had taken in more negative age beliefs at the start of the study who were in their early 20s, when they turn 60, when they reach their 60th birthday, if they've taken in more negative age beliefs in young adulthood, they were twice as likely to have a cardiovascular event like a heart attack or a stroke after they turned 60. I think what was really important in this study that we noticed is that it starts really early. Ideally, prevention of the negative age beliefs in ages and would actually start very early because it's future selves that future aging health that many decades later that can be impacted.

Darin: Wow. Now, you just opened up a Pandora's box. This is probably a question we all have. When we look at kids, and they're eating crap, and they're doing whatever, how do we get people to care? Hell, just across the board because if you're 30, you're going to be 40 and if you're 40, you're going to be 50 and if you're 50, you're going to be 60, and it's a lot of time that we could be forging health. What can we do because if you're 20 and you look perfect in some way, you don't have wrinkles, and you're not seeing these certain things, how can we impress upon these kids to say, hey, what you're doing now is forging a path of your life, and you're gonna sit in that 40-year-old seat, and those effects are what you're going to be sitting with? How do we bring that up in the lexicon of their attention, and really our attention because we are still got plenty of life to live?

Becca: That's a good observation. This is something I think about a lot because I teach young adults in a school of public health where I work, and I teach a class on healthy aging. A lot of the students start the semester with no idea that they had age beliefs, they have no idea about ageism, existing in the culture. The part of the reason that they don't have that knowledge is because we live in such an age-segregated society, and ageism can be so baked into the structure of our society. But what I would say though is that by the end of the semester, most of the students are very aware that ageism exists all around them. They start to notice it everywhere, and they become really angry about it. A lot of them want to go forward and change it. We know that young people have been very active in social movements today and have taken a leadership role. So I think with overcoming ageism and seeing the importance of it, we can raise that issue for people of all generations, including



young adults. It's both people that they love, so everybody has older people that they love, and most people do, and they also can see it as their future self. So if people get that awareness, this is decades down the line, you're going to be in this position, I think it makes people shift their beliefs and want to take on the tools to recognize the negative beliefs in ageism, and then shift them to more positive beliefs.

Darin: The thing that pops up the most is and what a great position to be in and to educate and to pass on this awareness to them so that they become aware. When you are aware, you have more choice. If you have more choice, you can take action on now, which you now are aware of. That's the beautiful thing about you writing Breaking the Age Code and you dedicating your life to the research and so I just want to say I had an absolute blast on this conversation. I'm so stoked to be able to have because literally I didn't think I'd ever have this type of conversation and because of you forging this path and dedicating yourself to it, it allows this and then let's proliferate that message into the world because I think it's powerful and I think there's wisdom to be had not only in our own awareness but also in our great aging population. So let's extract that knowledge to help us move forward. Dr. Becca Levy, I am so stoked. Thank you so much. Let's stay in touch for sure. I want to know what you're up to.

Becca: Thank you. Wonderful to talk to you. I really enjoy your podcast, so thank you.

[00:46:27] Podcast Outro

Darin: Thanks for tuning in to this episode of The Darin Olien Show. I hope you took something valuable away from this conversation that will help improve your life in some way. If you'd like to learn more about my incredible guests, you can find all of their information in the show notes on my website. If you enjoyed this episode, or even you didn't like it, please rate this podcast. The team and I value your feedback so we can continue to give you the most value possible. We want you to get the most out of every podcast. So please rate, subscribe, share anything you feel called to do. I truly appreciate it, and I love and value your support. So, thank you, and I'll meet you in the next episode.