

Engaging Older Adults in Technology Research: Exploring Opportunities for Flourishing

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Background

Meaningful collaboration yields valuable results [1].

Rapid advancements in technology have propelled older adults into a new digital era. Apps, wearables, robots, and artificially intelligent (AI) devices now support older adults to live well. Creating assistive technologies requires a rich understanding of end-user needs, values, and preferences. In technology research, engaging with older adults generates knowledge to produce solutions that are ethically aligned, relevant, and responsive to priorities [2].

Partnered engagement is gaining positive momentum and transforming how we conduct research, but there is much to still to learn [3].

Problem

The value of engagement is not universally acknowledged.

Despite the many positive biopsychosocial impacts of activity being well recognized, and the increasing availability of engagement strategies, older adults continue to face ageism and are limited from participating in innovative research [4,5].

Stigmatizing exclusion criteria include upper age limits, unfamiliarity with technology, cognitive decline, and other physical or psychological reasons [5].

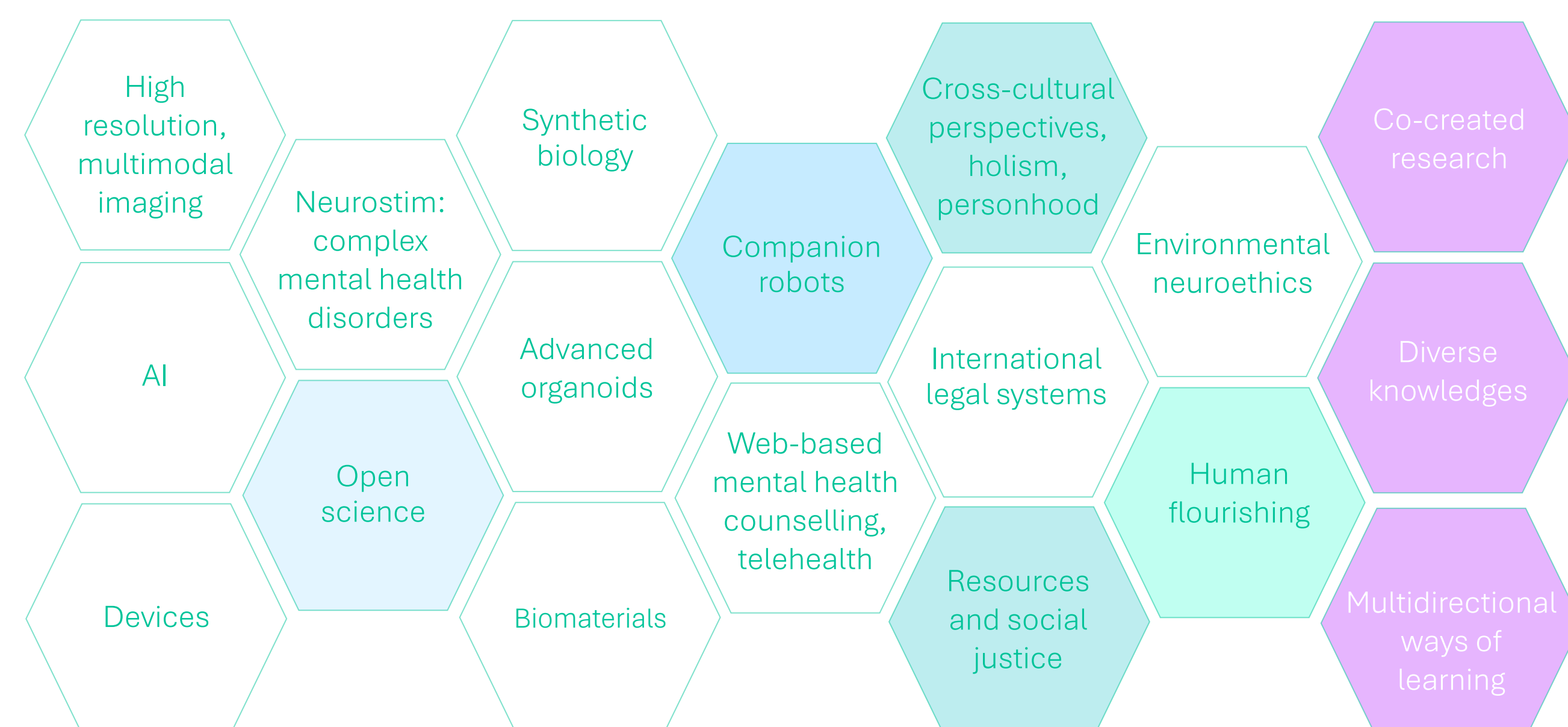
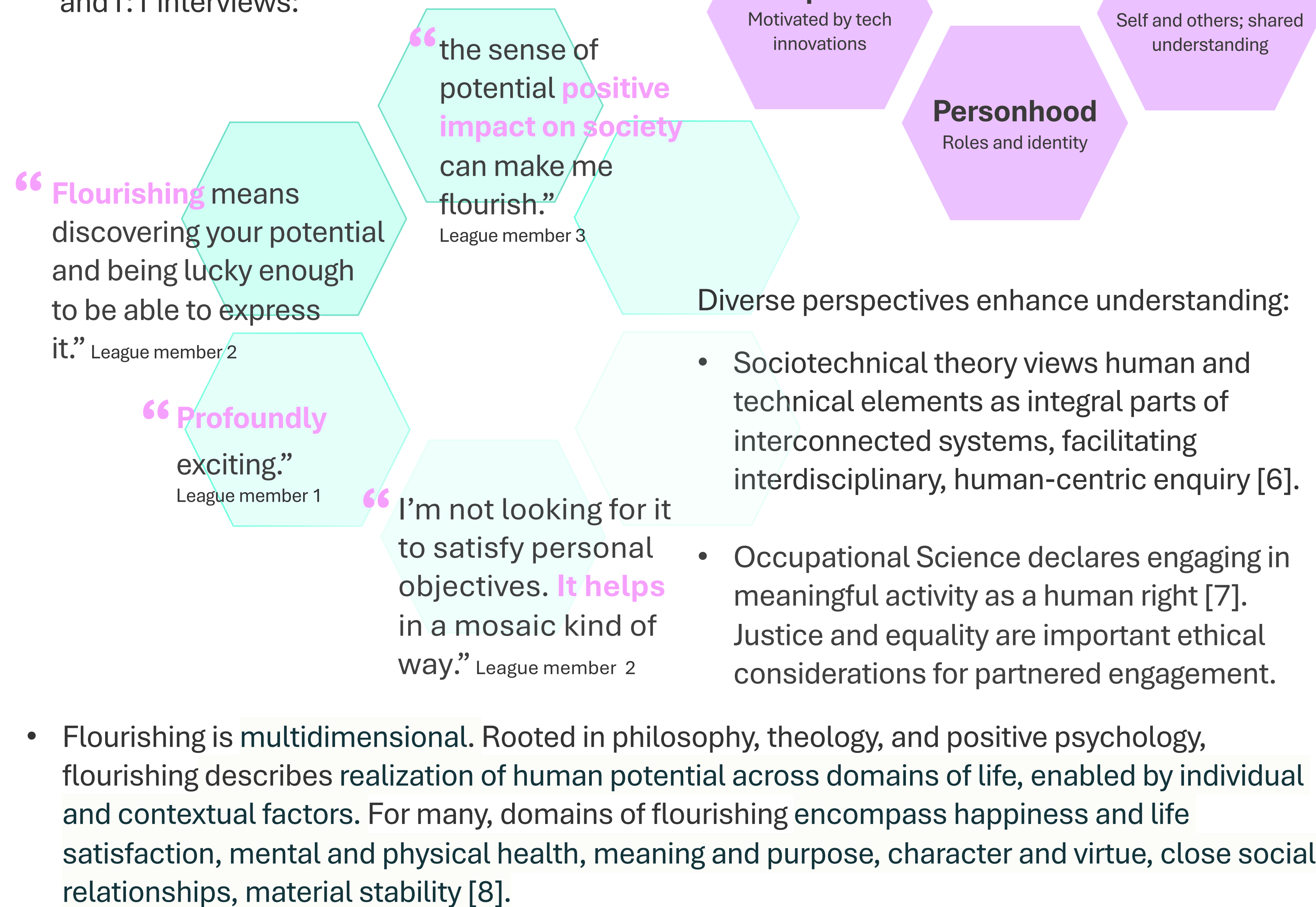
Little is known about the impact of engagement beyond research outcomes. The phenomenology of partnering in research calls for exploration. Might engagement promote opportunities for human flourishing?

References
[1] CIHR (2014)
[2] Robillard & Kabacinska (2020)
[3] PCORI (2024)
[4] Fardeau et al. (2023)
[5] Mannheim et al. (2022)
[6] Boström & Heinen (1977)
[7] WFOT (2024)
[8] VanderWeele (2017)
[9] Illes (2023)

Argumentation

Members of an older adult advisory group, The League, describe their experiences of engaging in technology research.

Themes from anonymous surveys and 1:1 interviews:



Mosaic of Neuroethics

Colored tiles show relevance of this study to contemporary neuroethics. The interconnected mosaic goes beyond the original pillars of neuroethics (Brain Science and the Self; Brain and Social Policy; Ethics and the Practice of Brain Science; Brain and Public Discourse and Training) to depict prominent areas of enquiry for today's neuroethicists [9].

Conclusions

Engagement has research and person-centered benefits. Unique perspectives shape how technology is designed and adopted by end users. Critical examination of engagement, under the lens of human flourishing, reveals that engagement is a complex, dynamic and personal experience.

Narrative accounts reveal proximal benefits for older adults. Impacts of engagement span life domains that are in symbiosis with health, wellbeing and human flourishing. Older adults value opportunities to contribute to innovative research that may broadly impact society. Technology is a vehicle for shared understanding and bolsters a sense of urgency that motivates participation in research.

Engaging in research is a meaningful and purposeful activity. Human rights and ethics are important considerations of partnered engagement.

Importance

This study adds fresh perspectives to the phenomena of engagement in research, revealing important ethical implications that may inform how we approach partnered engagement.

Further research from multidisciplinary perspectives will enhance knowledge of engagement and strengthen the field of translational neuroethics by stimulating inclusive, integrated and socially just research practices.

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