

Cultural Immersion Project

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CULTURAL IMMERSION: ELDERLY

Cultural Immersion Examining the Elderly

In this immersion project I look to examine the culture of the elderly and how they believe, thoughts about themselves, and how society views the elderly. There will be other factors that will be researched within this culture as we look to have a deeper understanding of the aging society. Something unique about this culture is that each person if they live long enough will become a part of this culture so it is important to understand them and how they integrate into society by learning the key factors.

Key Things Learned

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

Each culture is unique in how they view and care for the elderly. A largely discussed topic in this culture is care. As our bodies age, we start to look for how others are going to be able to care for us because we can no longer care for ourselves. This culture of people starts to come to the realization that they can no longer be independent and in turn look for care from others. The elderly culture is protected by pensions or social insurance in which different countries set in place to protect the elderly (Lockhart, C., 2001). Though in the United States we have social security as a plan to assist the elderly this was cut in the 1980's and is still looking for a solution on how to fund this appropriately (Lockhart, C., 2001). The elderly culture also can have a hard time adjusting as times are changing constantly and the nations they are within are ever changing. When the elderly are asked to move it is not easy for them to leave all that they have made behind. Whether it be moving to a new home in a new nation or into an elderly care

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home, leaving behind all the things they have accomplished or gained over time is extremely difficult for them (McGoldrick, et al., 2005, pg. 26).

Group Perceptions

In America, Berger (2017) says that we are obsessed with youth. This impacts the elderly as they may feel second thought with how our society views the youth and does everything to keep the youth prevalent (Berger, R., 2017). The elderly view this as them being pushed aside so that they can prioritize the “looking and feeling younger” idea in America. They feel as though they often still have more to contribute to society but are left more as an afterthought.

Behaviors, Practices, Customs

Each culture cares for the elderly differently and though they see themselves pushed aside in America there are many elderly care living facilities that are in place to care for these people as they age. Some cultures vow to keep the elderly living at home with them in order to take care of them.

Spirituality, Religion

Because this culture encompasses such a broad group there is no one religion more prevalent than the other. Each culture has elderly people within the culture they associate with. With that being said religions each handle the elderly differently and if you are religious, most of them believe in respecting the elders that paved the way and giving back to them as they age.

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Social Barriers in the United States and Internationally

As the elderly are associated within their own cultures they handle any barriers differently. If they are elderly and are an immigrant they may have different social barriers than that of an elderly white person within the United States. The elderly struggle now with issues of technology and an advancing world that in the past they would not have thought to be an issue with their growing age (Jefferson, R. S., 2019).

Key Historical Events

One key thing that is effecting this culture as of right now is the current pandemic that our world is facing with the Coronavirus. The coronavirus is especially found to be harmful in the elderly as the immune system is weakened. The CDC states that anyone over the age of 65 that contracts this virus can have the end result in death (People Who Are At Higher Risk For Severe Illness, 2020).

Key Things Learned in the Media

The media has a unique view of the elderly here more recently than before. The elderly all around the world are dying with a virus sweeping the Globe. Media outlets of all kinds are bringing awareness to this virus stating that to protect our loved ones (the elderly) that we must practice being clean and social distancing (Batura, P., 2020). This shift in the media took the turn out of nowhere as the elderly became the target group for this virus. With this more positive view on the elderly being pushed into the homes of people world wide we can see how this will overall effect the ongoing stereotypes the media has when this ends. The media is where we gain most of what we know on a daily basis and therefore can sway our opinions of people if we

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listen and watch it close enough. In an article by Koskinen, et al. (2014), the media seems to portray the elderly more positively than negatively. They look at how the media has a large part in how society will view the elderly due to how widespread the media truly reaches. Websites, newspapers, television, and magazines, are all examples where the media has influence and we each have access to those at all ages. Koskinen, et al. (2014), also states that people that are elderly on tv commercials are viewed in good health and very aware, but in tv shows they can be more angry and unsettled or irritable. This relates to how the country views the elderly depending upon their own values and where they receive these types of stereotypes. If someone watches tv shows all day but very rarely reads the newspaper they may be more likely to have a positive outlook on the elderly depending on how they have been depicted lately.

Surprises

One of the largest surprises so far has been how my lack of knowledge in the media has shown that though I thought the elderly would be portrayed poorly, that they are actually viewed very positively in the media. I think within my generation we look at the media to be a news outlet but that it also can have many faults and wrongs, so my view of the media caused me to think they would do this to this culture when in turn, (some due to recent times), the media has a very positive outlook on our aging generations.

Impact and Expectations

As I move forward with this project, I look forward to being creative as it will be exceptionally challenging reaching this culture in recent times. As most of the country is being told to stay home, the elderly are in utter fear to go out into public because their loves could be at

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risk. This is going to be challenging in learning about a culture that as for right now, is completely isolating themselves from the outside world.

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Cultural Immersion: Elderly Culture Part 2

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Elderly Culture

I am exploring the elderly culture through this immersion project and for this paper I looked into how my expectations matched up with the realizations I came too. Through events with the elderly culture, I will describe how my talks with a person from the culture and research have either supported my thoughts about them or shown me where I could be wrong.

Events Attended

In the current living situations within the United States, I was unable to attend social events with the elderly due to a pandemic that greatly affects them. Instead of social events I was given the option to watch and discuss two movies with someone from this culture. The first movie watched and discussed was one about an elderly woman who had become a widow. In the movie, *I'll See You in My Dreams*, a widow has a very normal life that she decides doesn't have a lot of excitement, so she begins dating life after many years alone. I found this one to be interesting because in my own experience I do not personally know many widows that have begun dating again. Having both grandmothers as widows, led me to believe that most do not date or marry again. My discussion with Mrs. Barbara Taylor led me to believe otherwise, she stated many of her friends have ended up dating if they lost their husbands early in life and that instead of being lonely, they would rather have someone to experience the life they have left with. To me this was where I realized I was wrong in my assumption that they would be alone. The second movie I watched was called *Going in Style*, in which three elderly men decide that with their current financial situations they want to rob a bank after being part of a successful robbery. This movie was interesting to discuss with Mrs. Taylor as she has never experienced anything like it, but the underlying purpose of the movie is what correlates with what matters in her culture. She said though it was a comedy, many elderly people do struggle financially sometimes and a lot of them want to be able to leave something behind for their family. If they are unable to leave anything for loved ones this often times is very hard on them and can cause

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depression. Mrs. Taylor has thought many times of if what she has done in her life is successful and what she will be able to pass on being enough for the ones she loves.

Comparison with Expectations

Though my discussions above were based on movies that we watched, I was able to ask about the research questions stated in part one of this assignment. I asked Mrs. Taylor about how she was feeling under the world's current circumstances and if the media portraying the elderly as scared was correct. She agreed with the media and said that though she has faced similar things in the past this current situation is different and that her as well as others in her age group are very afraid and that sometimes she does not trust that others not in that age group are doing what they can to protect the most effected. I expected that the media may be overplaying the situation and even that in these movies we watched that they were purely comedy, not necessarily to define underlying important values elderly people hold. By me being able to discuss these with someone that is living in the culture, it really helped bring out the points that I would have otherwise missed.

Emotional Impact

This impact on me has been somewhat as a surprise emotionally. I knew going into this project it would be important to learn about this culture because I would one day be part of it if I live long enough. A lot of the other cultures are something that you may be born into, but this particular culture incorporates all cultures into the same group as we age. Listening to the concerns of the elderly through Mrs. Taylor emotionally affected me on how I have been acting in public. The current virus in the nation is known to be less life threatening to the younger population and I have changed life some but not to the extent that she has had to change hers. This made me realize that I should be more careful and respectful of those around me when I am out in public as we all have certain things we must do, but elderly person next to me could be deathly afraid and I need to take that into consideration. With me one day becoming a part of this culture I believe it was also important to learn the values that they share so that I can maybe start

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thinking of decisions now that they wish they did during my age. One thing that emotionally changed me was hearing how Mrs. Taylor lost her mother. This is something that nobody plans for and made me put into perspective that one day I could lose mine. By hearing how she wished she could talk to the family she has lost, made me realize that I still have mine and I should not take for granted the moments I still have. I look forward to continuing talks with this elderly culture and learning on things that I can do now to help better my life and my emotional well-being when I become a part of their culture.

Key Things Learned

Key things that I learned from this experience are that the elderly culture is portrayed many ways and we must engage with them to find out what is true and what may not always apply. As we each grow into the older age and later part of life I have learned from my discussions and research that it is important to prepare for that part of life. A reoccurring concern both in the movies and the discussion with Mrs. Taylor, was that what they have done in life enough to say they were successful. I want to begin to realize that the decisions I make moving forward are about a bigger purpose if I want a family and can essentially give me a better mental well-being if I can look back on life as success and not failure. Also learning how losing loved ones is something each person faces will help me cherish the time I do have with them now. In the films both showed scenes of the lost loved ones and the ones they care about which really put in perspective what is important to the elderly culture as they are in the latter stages of life. If I can apply the main points of financial stability and preparing for late stages of life to how I live now, I will be setting myself up to adjust to this new culture with a clear mind and be able to help others adjusting with me as well.

Counseling Theories Validated for This Group

In the elderly culture counseling techniques of different varieties are used in order to help with the struggles of aging. The elderly is faced with numerous things as their bodies age, being physical, emotional and psychological changes. One of the main things that the elderly is at risk

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of is depression. In a study by George, Augustine, & Kumar (2020) we see the effects of how 1 in 4 elderly people can be diagnosed as depressed and by using cognitive behavioral therapy can limit the rate of the depression numbers in the elderly. To target depression, reminiscence therapy is used to limit depression in the elderly and is found to fight depressive thoughts or negative thoughts and to help focus more on pleasure as well as belonging (Chiang, Chu, Chang, Chung, Chen, Chiou, & Chou, 2010). By focusing on belonging it gives the patient a sense of relief which can be important to someone who is struggling with depression. Other factors such as blood pressure can affect the elderly population that needs therapy in specialized forms or techniques. Elevated blood pressure in elderly patients can cause many issues and early mortality issues as well. By using mindfulness and paced breathing with elderly patients it is proven to reduce blood pressure levels and stress which is found to be effective in sustaining longer life (Brenner, LeBlang, Lizotte-Waniewski, Schmidt, Espinosa, DeMets, Hennekens, 2020). The elderly population benefits from group therapy in each of these techniques above due to the sense of being around others and limiting loneliness and isolation that can occur in later life (Chiang, Chu, Chang, Chung, Chen, Chiou, & Chou, 2010). By limiting isolation of the elderly, we can lower the chances of feeling alone and depressed. These approaches to therapy show how effective methods will limit the elderly population in increasing in mortality, depression, self-isolation, comorbidity and other factors that this particular culture faces. By simply bringing them together and letting them be mindful of where they are in life and the support of others around them, we ultimately can change the thought process and the behaviors in which the elderly display, and we can reach progress in helping them sustain happier and longer lives.

Cultural Immersion: Elderly Part 3

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Cultural Immersion: Elderly Part 3

In part three of the cultural immersion project I was able to sit down and interview Mr. Jim Lowe. As someone who is just entering the elderly class, I wanted to gain perspective on how he feels about the generations to come. In the interview touching base on how he feels during this strange time in our nation with his culture under attack was important to making a common connection that we could expand on.

Interviewee Background and Personal Story

Jim Lowe is the elderly man that I was able to interview for this part of my immersion project. He was born into a large family in Forest Park, Georgia and moved to Asheville, North Carolina at the age of 13. He grew up in a family that loved music and was very talented. Jim can play multiple instruments and is still a very important part of his church's music department. By painting from an early age, he learned to do many "handy man" activities which has greatly helped him over the years by helping out his friends and loved ones. When we began talking about his culture, he was impressed out of my choices I choose the elderly and seemed surprised in thinking that it was a "culture".

Jim was very open in this interview as we talked, he discussed family, religion, success, and failures. I think that by starting the conversation with mutual interest in music and sports we made a bond that led to him feeling comfortable and being able to relate to what he viewed as a younger version of himself. This led to him feeling like he could relate, which then led to him feeling like I needed to learn things from him as he wished he knew at my age. I could tell the conversation was going to be a comfortable one when he started with a few jokes then led to his family story. When someone begins talking about their family, I feel that is a personal bond created between them and the person listening because it is usually something that they only discuss with trusted people.

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As we discussed the elderly culture, overall he was very positive about his transition so far. He still feels very good physically and can continue his life as normal. Jim did mention that when he is in public he does not want to be viewed as “elderly” because of the negative views that come with that. “I don’t want people to think I need help with daily activities or that I cannot take care of myself” was a specific quote from this interview. I believe this was more of trying to avoid the social view that the elderly need care as he feels he is living life as normal. This was one of the few negative instances he mentioned about being elderly. His positive experiences have been that he gets to be with his grandchildren on the weekends and they are his whole world. As part of the elderly culture he said he has so much to give back to his family with things he’s learned over his years of life. In the elderly community he says he loves knowing that he has lived a long life and that he looks back on what he views as success when he gets to watch his family grow.

Mr. Lowe seems to have a great grasp on being a part of the elderly culture. Though there are certain social views he disagrees with about the elderly and hesitation to be a part of that culture are evident, I believe that he is very in touch with this culture and is ultimately looking forward to the rest of his life as a part of it. Being able to look back on his life as a success was huge in showing that he knows how important it is in this culture to be stable minded and have a great view on what matters at this transition.

Emotional Response and New Learning

Emotionally I was able to connect with Jim on multiple areas of life. The importance of family was something we spoke in depth about and I reacted with a lot of sympathy. My family is very important to me and growing up I have always had a large and very close family. This was not surprising that we connected on this matter and emotionally I think it helped us both find a relatable bond that drove the rest of the conversation. It was like talking to someone with no barriers and I think that was important in leading to openness between us both. In the interview he may not have realized but it started to hit me that one day I would join this culture. As he

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discussed about the societal views he worried about, it emotionally affected me as I am a part of the society that has a view and I can use my voice to be better to and for those in this community.

By having this interview, it made me feel a sense of better understanding of this community and I had much different connection by being able to look someone in the eyes as they talk about life and experience. When reading about this culture I learned so much but hearing it from Jim has just been a much deeper meaning for me and it made all that I have read come to life.

One thing I learned from this interview that the other parts of this assignment did not teach me was that each person in this culture can feel different about it. As we talked, about the elderly, he discussed others and how they aged poorly. I knew that each person's aging was different but not how much that it affects their view on being a part of this culture. Jim does not mind being "elderly" because the transition has for the most part pretty easy. For the friends he has, some have been struggling with the thought of being elderly because they feel as if they have life they missed out on or made the wrong choices during that time. This showed me a whole new side to how the elderly community varies and how my life now is very important to my mental stability down the road.

Ethical and Legal Aspects to Consider

Autonomy would be considered one of the most important things when counseling the elderly as well as other cultures (Fitting, 1984). When the elderly is in counseling it is important to show them respect and to respect their wishes. If someone elderly is refusing treatment or is refusing to talk it is ethical that you as the counselor respect the wishes of the client and let them have space, and the choice to continue. Being loyal and trustworthy of shared information is also very important in the client and counselor relationship. This can be described by showing fidelity in which you can show the elderly client you are loyal to them and can be trusted with their information (Fitting, 1984).

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Multicultural Sensitivity and Biblical Worldview Reflection

Having sensitivity for the group that you are counseling is important in the professional world, in which it allows you to understand the subjects of matter for each culture or group being dealt with and shows your knowledge of them. The more you know and understand about what matters to a culture or group, the more sensitive you will become to the subjects that matter within that group and can effectively counsel those effected. I believe that knowing what each culture respects, believes, and responds to, is the most important when it comes to effectively addressing counseling needs of your client. If you go into counseling sessions blind to these sensitivities, then ultimately you will not be as effective and can even touch on subjects that are unrelatable. One thing that the elderly often prefer is that they work with older counselors, in which they feel more comfortable (Lemp, 2005). The elderly struggle with being provided the right care and in the right ways we will be able to effectively give the therapy needed such as psychotherapy that is proven to help with coping of different injuries and illness associated with aging (Gambatesa, D'Ambrosio, D'Antini, Mirabella, De Capraris, Iuso, & Cinnella, 2013). If we know the actual problems of the culture and the right ways to address it, we can make the correct changes and effectively counsel them.

I believe that in this particular culture that the spiritual walk is very important. Through my research and the discussion I've had, I have learned that this group of people has deeper perspective than others. We can pray for our elderly by praying first and foremost for the physical body as they age, the mind as it ages and the care they receive. By learning of the care and the importance of that care to the elderly, I know that we can pray and push to provide the best care possible to those who cannot care for themselves. Each person spoken to and in case studies read wanted to leave behind something of value to their family as one of the most important values they have. As the family of these elderly people we can use or faith and or voice to do our best to provide the best care and thoughts for those aging as we will eventually

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be in their place one day. The care of the elderly is very important and is often not sufficient to certain communities such as the black, Latino and even the white communities and we can do something to change that through prayer and our voice (Hays & Erford, 2018).

Conclusion

When coming to the end of this project and reflecting on the findings of the elderly culture, I have learned so much about what I thought I knew about. If I had to choose, the interview in part three of this project has given me the most information about this culture. I believe that you can read articles, watch videos and research all you want to about culture, but when you actually sit down with someone that is living it real time and getting honest opinions from no other source but that person is the most important source there is. I am grateful that I was able to talk with people in this culture and to learn about them because one day I will be a part of this culture and I have a better understanding of the values they have and even choices they wish they made at my age. This has been a very beneficial project for me and will ultimately help me in my counseling career by knowing the right avenues for success that I need to get educated about other cultures.

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