CHAPTER 13: THE ELDERLY

Web Link  Administration on Aging

Annotation: The Administration on Aging (AoA) website includes information designed for older Americans and their families as well as those concerned about providing opportunities and services to enrich the lives of older persons and support their independence.

Learning Objective: To develop awareness of the unique concerns of older people.

Faculty Note: As people become older their concerns change. The exercise below is intended to help students expand their awareness of the unique concerns of older people, an important component of the social construction of aging.

Activity: Have students click on the Web Links, "Administration on Aging." Have them browse the links on this website, then click on "Older People and Their Families" and "Statistics about Older People." Ask students to make a list of the issues covered in these fact sheets. Lead a discussion of why these issues are of particular concern to older people.


Test Question: (Short answer) List five issues that are of particular concern to older people, as indicated by the Administration on Aging list of pamphlets that provide information for older persons and their families.

Answers might include: Health, elder abuse, nutrition, disabilities, long-term care, transportation, volunteer activities, housing options, raising grandchildren, pension benefits, employment.

Sociology and the Internet  Explore the Practice of Ageism

Annotation: Ageism is defined as prejudice, discrimination, and hostility directed against people because of their age. The links at this website explore ageism more deeply. Two articles discuss the different types of ageists and what we can do to combat ageism.

Learning Objective: To identify ageism in humorous greeting cards.

Faculty Note: Ageism is particularly difficult to combat because it is so pervasive in popular culture, where its expression is widely perceived to be a socially acceptable form of humor. We often think of “ageism” solely in terms of discrimination against the elderly, but actually it is discrimination based on any age group.

Activity: Have students read Sociology and the Internet, "Explore the Practice of Ageism." Then have them go to a store that sells greeting cards and read the birthday cards designed to be given to people over age 30. Have them write down excerpts from these cards that contain ageist ideas. Next to each excerpt have them specify the ageist idea it expresses.

Additional Resources: Students may take the 20-question "What Is Your Aging I.Q.?” test on-line at [http://iucar.iu.edu/geninfo/ageiq.php3]. After they take the test and submit their answers, it is immediately graded and returned to them with explanations of why the correct answers are correct.
Video Activity (Premium Resource CD Rom)  Myths and Realities of Aging

Annotation: Older people, interviewed in this video, were inspired to view themselves as capable of doing many things by the space shuttle flight of 77-year-old John Glenn in 1998.

Learning Objective: To identify personal attitudes toward the process of aging.

Faculty Note: Students of traditional undergraduate age (19-22) typically do not think about growing older. The exercise below encourages them to think about the process of aging and to identify their hopes and concerns. This video clip is a part of the Premium Resources CD Rom provided to instructors upon request.

Activity: Have students view the video Myths and Realities of Aging. Lead a discussion with them about what they think their life will be like when they are over 65. Ask them what they hope for and what they fear about old age. Have them talk about the older people in their families, and the kinds of role models these people provide for them.

Additional Resources: A selection of writings by Australian teenagers, anticipating what their lives will be like in the year 2050, can be found by going to the Excite search engine http://home.vicnet.net.au/Excite/AT-ic99query.html and searching for "2050."

Test Question: (Essay) Why was the 1998 space shuttle flight of John Glenn particularly important for older Americans?

Answers might include: John Glenn’s space shuttle flight was inspiring for older people because it showed that an older person could do something that was very physically demanding, and widely thought to be beyond the capacity of an older person.

Video Activity II (Premium Resource CD Rom)  Marriage and Health

Annotation: This video depicts older people dancing and talking about keeping active and healthy. Married people are less likely to drink and engage in risky behavior. People who remain married live longer than those whose marriages end in divorce or death. Length of marriage is unrelated to longevity; remaining married is the key factor. People who never marry are also likely to live longer.

Learning Objective: To identify the likely causal relationships between marriage and longevity.

Faculty Note: People who remain married throughout adulthood and those who never marry live longer. The exercise below will engage students in developing hypotheses about the causal relationships that favor these two groups.

Activity: Have students watch the video Marriage and Health. Lead a discussion about the advantages, for longevity, of remaining married and never marrying. Work with students to develop hypotheses about the behavioral and psychological processes that favor these two groups over those that marry, but whose marriages end in divorce and widowhood. This exercise builds on the text's discussion of activity theory.

Additional Resources: In 1973 Dr. Grossarth-Maticzek gave a brief test measuring habitual feelings of pleasure and well-being to thousands of elderly residents of Heidelberg, Germany. Twenty-one years later, he compared the test scores with health status. The 300 people who had scored highest were asserted to be thirty times more likely to be alive and well twenty-one years later than the 200 lowest. A report of these findings and a link to the test itself can be found at the website "Attitudes: Key to Health, Happiness, and Longevity" http://www.attitudefactor.com. Students could take the test and have it evaluated on-line, but would have to submit personally identifying information.
Chapter Thirteen
The Elderly

Sociology and the Internet  Explore the Problem of Elder Abuse

Annotation: The problem of elder abuse is described in two web links. Students are asked to construct a pamphlet that answers questions about elder abuse.

Learning Objective: To develop a more detailed understanding about the ways in which elderly people are abused.

Faculty Note: The term "abuse" may be too general for students to appreciate the variety of ways older people are abused in our society. The exercise below expands on the presentation on elder abuse in the textbook.

Activity: Have students go to Sociology and the Internet "Explore the Problem of Elder Abuse" and click on Elder Abuse Prevention Information and Resource Guide at [http://www.oaktrees.org/elder/](http://www.oaktrees.org/elder/) Then have them click on "Definitions of Abuse," and have them read the list of ways old people are abused.


The Video Professor  Space Cowboys or The Crew

Annotation: Space Cowboys is a story that came on the heels of John Glenn’s successful flight on the Space Shuttle as the oldest human in space. Four retired test pilots from the pre-NASA days are recruited to fix a damaged satellite because they are the only living engineers who know the outdated system. In The Crew, four wise guys from the 1960’s are now retired senior citizens living in Miami. They miss the fast pace of hijacking, kidnapping, fast women, and living on the edge. In both films, the same issues of ageism are addressed.

Learning Objective: To recognize the impact ageism has on the elderly both as a group impact and the personal distress it creates.

Faculty Note: Both movies are set in present day and both refer back to the late 50s and 60s as the baseline the characters remember as being their prime. Both movies are well done and have excellent casts. They are available for rental at movie houses, or may be available in the university library or a local public library.

Activity: Have the students make a list of all the comments made by others to the aging quartet of characters that show disrespect or a failure to be sensitive to their unique situation created by age. In each situation, have the student document the reaction of the senior characters and how the senior character dealt with the remark. Also include in the assignment the issues each character was most concerned about and why. What unique qualities did the senior actors demonstrate that were a result of their age?

Additional Resources: The Crew has two sites that will add to the discussion. They are [http://www.upcomingmovies.com/crew.html](http://www.upcomingmovies.com/crew.html) and [http://www.rottentomatoes.com/movie-1099038/reviews.php](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/movie-1099038/reviews.php).

Space Cowboys has several more sites. They include [http://www2.warnerbros.com/spacecowboys](http://www2.warnerbros.com/spacecowboys), [http://www.rottentomatoes.com/movie-1099659/reviews.php](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/movie-1099659/reviews.php), and [http://www2.warnerbros.com/spacecowboys](http://www2.warnerbros.com/spacecowboys). The reviews of each film make reference to the "age" of the actors as well as statements that equate the film’s interest to particular age groups.