

Closing the Gap Between Generations

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Introduction

Older and younger generations are often living in separate spaces in our society. In this poster, I will discuss the factors that may cause such separation and the benefits that can result from creating relationships between the different generations. I will also address how we can bridge the gap between these generations and propose an intergenerational program that can help ease the aging process, benefit younger individuals, and create a more integrated society.

Factors that cause age segregation

Public spaces (Noon & Ayalon, 2018)

- A study was conducted in Israel to examine the activities older adults participate in public places. In two neighborhoods, two sites with open spaces, one space was an open outdoor space while the other was enclosed with a park and shopping center, were analyzed. Photographs were taken of everyone present at each location, once in the summer and once in the winter.
- The neighborhoods with the two sites had a high population of older adults, making up 17-25% of the population in the neighborhoods
- 311 out of 423 individuals present in photographs were older adults
- Just over half of the older adults remained alone in those locations, while others left or met with other individuals
- The places at the sites seemed old-fashioned and targeted the tastes of the older adults. These spaces may attract older adults and not other individuals, leading to segregated public spaces
- These spaces are close to the older adults homes, so they may feel more comfortable there than in other public spaces



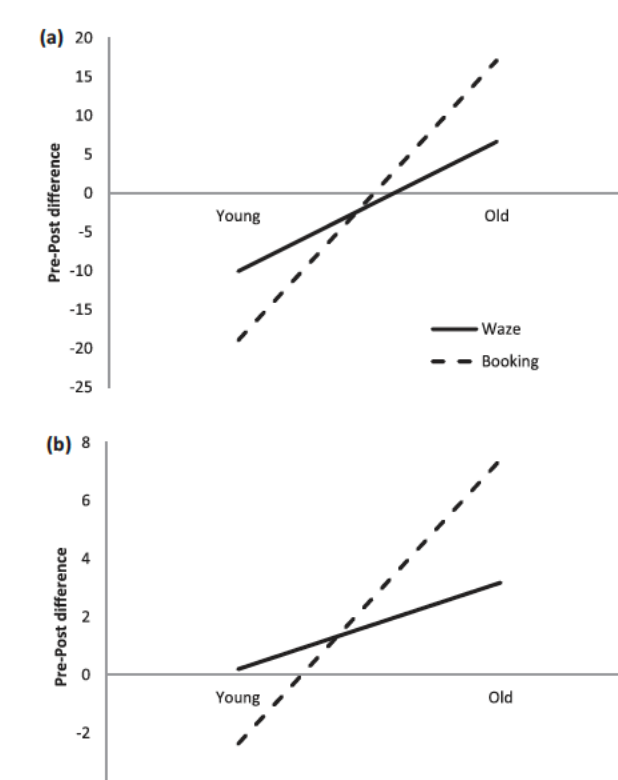
Comfort inside of the home

- Daily routines
- Sense of control and safety
- Outside places are less well-known compared to inside of the home, which may cause older adults to choose to stay in their home instead of going to public areas (Rowles, Oswald, & Hunter, 2004)
- Limited mobility makes it difficult to get around in public areas and affects their independence, quality of life, and how often they can get out into the community (van Leeuwen et al., 2014)

Technology gap

- Older adults have the least experience with technology and utilize technology the least of any age group (Freddolino et al., 2018)
- A variety of things may prevent older individuals from using technology (Marsch, Hegel & Greene, 2019), such as:
 - Impaired vision
 - Cognitive challenges
 - Physical limitations
 - Disbelief in technology
- Technology makes older adults feel old (Caspi, Daniel, & Kavé, 2019)

While using unfamiliar (BOOKING) and familiar (WAZE) applications on a tablet, older adults feel old for both applications. But the effect of feeling old was stronger when using unfamiliar applications.



Line Marking: Mark the age they felt on a line from "birth" to "death"

Numeric: answer 5 subjective questions relating to age

Individuals Living Alone

Time spent at home

- Nearly 80% of the activities older adults participate in occur in their home
- Almost 40% of that time is leisure (Baltes et al., 1999; Baltes, Wahl, & Schmid-Furtoss, 1990)

Physical health

- Mortality risk decreases by 9-15% when married (Manzoli et al., 2007)
- Depressive symptoms are likely to strengthen biological aging and tiredness (Halvorsrud et al., 2010)

Mental health

- Lower levels of self-esteem and life-satisfaction, and experience a higher risk for depression. (Kim & Lee, 2015)
- More likely to report feeling sad and worthless, participate in less physical activity, and experience less social support (Yu, Hou, & Miller, 2018)
- Symptoms of depression among older adults are less likely to present themselves as depressive thoughts. They are more likely to present themselves as inactivity or lack of energy (Halvorsrud et al., 2010)

Independence

- Most older adults wish to live at home for as long as possible (Portacolone, 2015)
- Take care of the household by themselves, including doing all of the chores, buying groceries, making payments, and keeping themselves company (Portacolone, 2015)

Getting Older Adults Involved

Intergenerational programs:

- **Provide learning experience**
 - Having college students volunteering with older adults allows the college students to learn from the older adults
 - Older adults can experience a sense of purpose and an opportunity to share their knowledge
- **Foster connection between the generations**
 - Studies have shown that intergenerational integration can reduce ageism (Colston, Harper, & Mitchener-Colston, 1996) and enhance better understanding of each generation

Intergenerational fitness programs:

- **Enhance healthy aging for the elderly** (Colston, Harper, & Mitchener-Colston, 1996)
 - Exercise is extremely important during the aging process for helping facilitate healthy aging. College students generally enjoy being physically active, so encouraging them to volunteer through helping older adults be physically active could be mutually beneficial.
- **Get familiar with the aging process for the young**
 - This would allow college students to become more familiar with the aging process while creating a safe environment for older individuals to improve their health and ensure healthier aging



Technology tutoring programs:

Peers taught older adults how to use forms of communication such as email, online chat rooms, internet, webcams, and voice technology (Woodward, 2012)

- Increased confidence in older adults
- Provide effective teaching and learning: peer teachers were at least as effective as project-coordinator teaching

A Proposed Intergenerational Integration Program

The number of older adults who are living alone today is continuing to increase (Portacolone, 2015). Through an intergenerational program that fosters connection between older and younger adults, we can make it a long-term beneficial experience for younger and older adults.

Program design

For those who want to participate:

- An interview process would be completed for older adults and students
- Students would be paired up with older adults with the same gender, similar personalities, and the same desires of what they wish to get out of the relationship
- College students would move-in to the home of an older adult who lives alone for a discounted rent. They can agree on committing to the living arrangement for either a single school semester or the entire school year
- Sign a contract agreeing to the conditions of the living arrangement, including the rules of the house such as, one week trial period before commitment is made
- Older adults who participate gain free access to the school gym and library, as well as free busing to those locations

Implementation of the program

- A program started up at Grand Valley State University with a board of members composed of faculty, students, and older adults from the community
- Reach out to older adults in the community living alone who would like to be a part of the program
- Reach out to students at the university, finding students who would wish to participate in this program
- Board members would create a questionnaire for interested parties to complete, then arrange an interview, pair up like-minded individuals with each other, and ensure the contract created is appropriate

Potential Problems

- The pairing between individuals doesn't work out
- Integrating the resources
- Not finding individuals who want to participate



Solutions

- Contract will be signed and there will be a trial period
- Get the word out and inform individuals of the potential benefits

Benefits

- Pairing an older adults with a college roommate from Grand Valley State University would allow the older adult to remain independent while also having companionship in the comfort of their own home
- The older adult has many skills they could teach, including cleaning, cooking, and life skills. The student could help around the living quarter, help keep an eye on them to make sure they are safe and healthy, while also offering a new, fun perspective
- Many older adults face depression and malnutrition (Dean, 1992), but through this living situation, the student can ensure the older adult is taking care of themselves and can help get rid of any loneliness that may cause depression
- Moving into one of their spare rooms, the student would gain discounted housing and the older adult would make money
- This program would help older adults feel more connected with the community, and would allow them to have a more positive experience of aging
- By creating a way for younger and older adults to connect, we can reduce the intergenerational gap

Contact Information

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