Creating the Tradition of Honoring the Older Population

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Creating the Tradition of Honoring the Older Population

Presented by:

Catherine Weisbeck

April 2009

Master's Thesis

Submitted to:

Scott Berlin, Thesis Chair
Patty Stow Bolea, Thesis Committee Member
Kate Luckert Schmid, Thesis Committee Member

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work
School of Social work
Grand Valley State University
This thesis is dedicated to my friends at
Bishop Hills Elder Care Community in Rockford, MI,
who are my teachers in the classroom of life,
who inspired this research study,
and through whose thoughts, prayers, and positive energy
the final product reached completion.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the much appreciated support and assistance of my Thesis Committee. Scott Berlin, my Thesis Chair, has been encouraging and enthusiastic about this research since the day we first discussed it. Patty Stow Bolea has never doubted my ability to design, implement, and complete this study. Kate Luckert Schmid has provided invaluable comments and questions for optimizing the scope of this endeavor.
"Elders are the jewels of humanity that have been mined from the Earth, cut in the rough, then buffed and polished by the stonecutter's art into precious gems that we recognize for their enduring value and beauty. Shaped with patience and love over decades of refinement, each facet of the jewel reflects light that awakens our soul to intimations of its own splendor. We sense such radiance in our youth but we cannot contain it. It requires a lifetime's effort to carve out the multifaceted structure that can display our hidden splendor in all its glory."

Zalmon Schachter-Shalomi

"Being an elder of the tribe is awesome, demanding, and exhilarating. Elders have a purpose for living that's stronger than any physical disabilities that might slow us down. As the mind and spirit triumph over the body's infirmities, we work passionately to achieve our goals of social justice, environmental safety, and cross-cultural understanding."

Maggie Kuhn
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Abstract

This qualitative research study explored what it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture. In this exploratory study, 15 participants were interviewed in person using a series of ten open ended questions. The participants were selected according to the criteria of being an older adult, working with or volunteering for older adults, or having been involved in a project which considered the older population as a subgroup within the total population. The participants were personally invited by the researcher to be interviewed and the interview took approximately 40 minutes. Results indicated that creating the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture would require a change on every individual’s part as well as a social revolution. Findings also indicated that the changes were needed not only on the part of society but also on the part of the older population. As society provides opportunities for the older population to be honored, the older population needs to understand and accept what it means to be honored.
Chapter One - Introduction

By 2030, the Administration on Aging has reported that over 70 million persons, constituting 20% of the total population living in the United States, will be in the over 65 year old age bracket (as cited in Kolomer, Lewinson, Kropf, & Wilks, 2006). Never before in history has the older population existed in these numbers (Dychtwald & Flower, 1990). In the United States the older population has been identified as a sociological out-group, a subgroup of the population that possesses certain characteristics that set it apart from the rest of the population (Jansson, 2005). In the case of the older population those characteristics include “old age.” Since the American culture tends to focus on youth and productivity as the basis for success and sustainability, old age is viewed with a negative attitude and results in the perspective called ageism.

Ageism is the attitude of prejudice and discrimination toward older people. It is the result of fear and anxiety over aging, dying, and death (Wolff, 1998). Ageism not only affects the way someone regards an older person, but it also expresses personal insecurities and beliefs. The current status of the older population in American society reflects many of the beliefs held by the American culture. Once people get “old” and become “unproductive,” society no longer wants them around as a reminder that each individual will eventually grow old and die.

This attitude is further reflected in the current movement toward anti-aging which seems to imply that aging is something to be avoided, perhaps a mistake in the order of things. This attitude moves outside the obvious natural cycle of the planet, the natural process of birth, development, maturity, and death. Research into aging began with the individual and the concept that growing old was the result of facing problems of
adjustment because of life role changes (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2005). Hooyman and Kiyak commented that “some of our stereotypes of older people may be the result of unconscious theorizing about the meaning of growing old” (p. 283). This unconscious theorizing would be based in the cultural attitudes learned about aging in American society which sees growing old as negative and, for the most part, unacceptable.

Scientific theories about aging cycled through a concentration on the individual in the act of growing old to the societal factors that affected aging to the interactive processes that created the environment for aging. These theories progressed through the initial use of quantitative methods into the use of various qualitative methods that involved the older population themselves in exploring the meaning of aging (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2005). By the mid 1990s there was a recognition that the older population often had “nonmaterial resources such as respect, approval, love, wisdom, and time for voluntary activities” (Hooyman & Kiyak, p. 293) to give to the interaction or exchange with society. With this recognition that older adults have something to give, there emerged studies of a qualitative nature that explored how individuals looked at their own aging and how they constructed their own reality. From this research, suggestions were made to look not only at the problems of being old, but also at the attributes of aging such as strengths, resilience, and how barriers are overcome (Hooyman & Kiyak).

Since the older population is going to continue to grow in American culture, it seems critical to explore more deeply the current societal perspective on the older population. There is a need to recognize how this population perceives itself in American society and to determine the potential resource of the older population for society. Since every human being has the potential for being a member of this group, the approach used
to recognize and accept what this group has to offer is the future of what every human being can expect when entering this phase of the human process of aging. Since past research and scientific theory support the premise that the older population does have something to give back to society, it seems critical that opportunities be developed for that societal exchange to take place. In light of seeking the avenue for these opportunities, the purpose of this research was to explore what it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture.

This qualitative research study involved interviewing 15 community members who were specifically selected for this research. The criteria for participation included being a member of the older population, having worked with or volunteered for the older population, or having been involved in a project that viewed the older population as a subgroup of the total population. These 15 participants were personally invited by the researcher to be interviewed for the study. The interview consisted of 10 open ended questions, was audio taped, and took approximately one hour to complete. The purpose of the study was to explore current views of how the older population is treated in American society, the benefits of having the tradition of honoring the older population, what it would take to create such a tradition, and what steps could be taken now to establish this tradition in American society. This thesis will present the results of this research.
Chapter Two – Literature Review

The literature review for this qualitative exploratory research will begin with a look at the meaning of culture and how it affects the members living in that culture. In order to gain some perspective on a tradition of honoring the older population, such a tradition is explored in three cultures: Native American, Japanese, and Latino. This is followed by an examination of American culture and the existence of ageism. Research on the older population and the research implications that aging can have positive aspects will be discussed. Some of these positive aspects will be explored. The literature review will conclude with a summary.

The culture in which one lives and matures provides a perspective by which the world is defined and growth is monitored. Johnson (2000) defined culture as "historical, bound up in traditions and practices passed through generations; memories of events – real or imagined – which define a people and their worldview’ (p. 121). Hooyman and Kiyak (2005) defined culture as "a complex system and process of shared knowledge, beliefs, traditions, symbols, language, art, and social organizations" (p. 527). Smelser considered culture a “system of patterned values, meanings, and beliefs that give cognitive structure to the world, provide a basis for coordinating and controlling human interactions, and constitute a link as the system is transmitted from one generation to another” (as cited in Johnson, 2004, p. 224). Helman described culture as the manner in which an individual determines how to live, processes everyday occurrences, and basically finds meaning in one’s life and world (as cited in Hooyman & Kiyak). Hooyman and Kiyak stated that “age is a social construct with social meanings and social implications” (p. 6). Therefore, one’s perspective on the process of aging is constructed
within one’s culture and becomes part of one’s worldview. This implied that different cultures may regard aging and the older person in different ways. To better understand the cultural implications of aging and being old, these concepts will be explored in the three cultures of the Native American, the Japanese, and the Latino, followed by the American culture.

Native American Culture

Baldridge (2001) referred to the Native American elders as “our strength, our living heritage, our teachers” and included that the elders are “the keepers of our traditions and the guardians of our way of life” (p. 1515). Baldridge named respect for the Native American elders as a common value that would be recognized by all the nation’s tribes. In his article Indian Elders: Family Traditions in Crisis, Baldridge talked about the romantic images many White Americans have formulated due to movies and television. He went on to describe the current state of today’s Native American elders who struggle with daily problems including poverty, health issues, and difficulty accessing needed services. In spite of the current oppression experienced by the elders, the tradition is still maintained with elders serving as mentors and counselors, telling the stories and folkways of the tribe, helping to tend crops and gardens, maintaining households, and providing day care for the young. In concluding his comments about Indian elders and their changing role due to the oppressive nature of their modern lives, Baldridge stated that the solutions of these issues will most likely come from the Native Americans themselves, from their communities, families, and from the elders, rather than from outside help or resources.
Schweitzer (1999) presented a comprehensive view of American Indian grandmothers who are considered elders in some tribes, but not in all. Becoming a grandmother may be a biological tie or it may be an honor bestowed by the tribe. It may be a title given to any older woman or something that needs to be earned. The title of grandmother is one of respect and honor and comes with specific responsibilities. All grandmothers are involved in childcare and childrearing, which may be temporary or long term. The duties of a grandmother include passing on tribal traditions and values, and instilling a sense of “Indianness.” The grandmother’s ability to pass on the culture of the tribe is regarded by many as her most significant contribution to the continuation of the Indian communities.

A study by Weibel-Orlando (1989) provided a comparison of the role of Native American elders in the nineteenth century, during the 1970s and early 80s, and through a qualitative study completed from 1983-1986. At the turn-of-the century, the older Indian became an elder who was a person of substance and value, with dignity, and held in great respect. There were Councils of Elders recognized as the active centers of the decision-making of the tribe. The elders held high places in government and political affairs and were the ones to transmit the culture of the tribe to the younger generations. Being an elder was something all tribal members aspired to become.

In discussing the Native American elders in the 1970s, Weibel-Orlando (1989) commented that many Indian societies still needed and highly respected the older segment of their community. She talked about a synergistic power that the elder had due to the individual’s control over valuable cultural resources such as ritual knowledge, healing lore, property, political power, oral histories, and other ethnic artifacts. The older
Indians made valuable contributions to tribal life and were included in the tribal councils. Some participated in foster parent programs and many were spiritual leaders for their people. In 1983 Weibel-Orlando and her colleagues began a three year, cross-cultural study of Native American elders to determine factors in successful aging. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 40 Native American elders, including men and women. The results showed that those elders who held some community status or role were benefited positively both socially and psychologically. Factors that supported good mental health and personal well being included active involvement in Indian community life, holding community recognized and valued political and spiritual roles, interaction with family on a regular basis and particularly grandchildren, being able to contribute to the community, helping others, and receiving community recognition for good works performed. All the duties of the elder from the past traditions were the source of life and well-being to the older Native American in today’s world.

Japanese Culture

The Japanese culture is noted for its respect and honor given to the elders. Palmore and Maeda (1985) stated that the most common term used for the aged in Japan means “the honorable elders.” In describing the older population in Japan, the phrases used included being at the peak of the status and power structure, being obeyed and venerated by their children and their grandchildren, and being respected by all of society for their long life and many years of experience and their accumulated wisdom. In the family system the elder normally “earns” affection and respect from the younger members of the family by the fairness, wisdom and assistance shown by the elder. The
amount of public respect for elders in Japan is stated in the 1963 National Law for the Welfare of the Elders: "The elders shall be loved and respected as those who have for many years contributed toward the development of society, and a wholesome and peaceful life shall be guaranteed to them" (Palmore & Maeda, p. 87). Also in 1963 September 15 was designated as Respect for Elders Day. On this day there are ceremonies in honor of the elders and gifts are presented to those who reached the age of one hundred during the year. For the most part the Japanese do not try to hide their age, in fact they tend to be proud of their elder status. It is polite and proper to ask an older Japanese person their age and to congratulate the person regarding the age.

Maeda and Ishikawa (2000) discussed the retirement, daily lives, pensions, and social security of the aging in Japan. One of the expected practices in Japanese family life is that the elders will live with their children and be dependent on them, rather than live alone. A popular proverb states "When old, obey your children" (Maeda & Ishikawa, p. 122). Maeda and Ishikawa reported the results of a study on the opinions of older Japanese in which 54.2% aged 60 years and older stated that it was their desire to live with their children. However, the attitude of the younger Japanese is changing as more than 50% of middle-aged Japanese men and women are considering living separately from their children in their later years. This will present a challenge to the country since there is a shortage of institutional and community care services provided for the older population. The families who are caring for the elders are experiencing a heavy burden within the family as the elders become frail and seriously impaired. Japan is also facing a crisis in the workforce as the shortage of young workers due to birthrates will mean the need for keeping the older population in the workforce. The results on an
international comparative study in 1996 showed that on average, the Japanese elders spend more time working to earn income, performing activities with the children’s family with whom they live, and watching TV.

Traphagan (2004) reported some changes in the Japanese family structure. After World War II, the Japanese began to adopt the Western concept of the nuclear family which promoted a more democratic view of how a family functions and interacts. This concept was quite different from the traditional Japanese family which promotes top down authority. In this change of the family structure, the elders were alienated from their own generation’s expectations about elder lifestyles and interpersonal relations, specifically the respect and honor to be given them by the younger generations. This honor and respect was not to be found and much stress has been generated among the generations. However, the elders continue to prefer the multigenerational households and for the most part continue to find the warmth and closeness that comes with living with children and grandchildren.

**Latino Culture**

In researching the place of elders in the Latino culture, Sotomayor (1989) pointed out that there are many groups within the Latino community and there are definite class and ethnic/racial differences among these groups. He stated that the preference for the Spanish language is probably the one common element among the groups. The strong identification with the language is usually tied to a strong identification with different elements of the culture. Although it is difficult to generalize, Sotomayor stated that common among all the groups is a high reliance on family ties, a strong sense of community, and the importance of religion. Of these common elements, the most
important institution for Latinos is the family which is characterized by intergenerational obligations, interactions, and mutual help. The elders of the Latino intergenerational family network play an important role in at least three key family functions: socializing younger generations, being the source of emotional support in times of need and crisis, and providing cultural and linguistic points of reference across generations giving meaning and direction to family members especially in a hostile environment. This type of network has been a source of experiencing belonging, loyalty, mutual responsibility, and economic assistance across generations.

Chiriboga (2004) reported on a study of 3,050 Mexican American elders 65 years of age to 99 years living in the southwestern United States. The study was focused on the acculturation of these elders into the different linguistic and social environments of the United States. Acculturation referred to the degree to which the elders changed when faced with living in a cultural context different from their own. Chiriboga stated that acculturation is not necessarily a process that comes to completion but plays a continuing and independent role in the lives of the elders. In fact, researchers are becoming interested in the idea that acculturation does not eliminate the influence of the culture of origin which may continue to be valued and to guide behavior. There is a new emphasis on biculturality which refers to the extent the individual attains the new culture and still retains the old. The Mexican American elders were interviewed for this study. Of interest, men were significantly more likely to use English than women, and men were more likely to report language biculturality. The oldest old were more likely to rely on the Spanish language. One observation that resulted from this study is that the functional significance of a measure of acculturation does not exist in a vacuum but must be studied
and considered in the context of the social environment. This observation is congruent with the knowledge that the family is the most important institution for the Latinos (Sotomayor, 1989).

Dietz (1995) conducted a study using secondary analysis of the 1988 National Survey of Hispanic Elderly People Living Alone intending to gain information about Hispanic elders in the United States regarding economic, health, and social status. Dietz was particularly interested in the elders of the Mexican American population with a focus on to what extent these elders need assistance and whether their families are meeting these needs. The most critical finding regarding the Mexican American elders was that 60% live below the poverty line and less than 10% are receiving financial assistance from their family. This low percentage is accounted for by the fact that so many of their families were living below the poverty line. The study showed there is frequent contact with their children, but relatively little help is given to the elders by their families. In fact the survey showed that more elders were giving to their families than receiving money themselves. It was also noted that the interaction between younger Mexican American family members and elders is strong with more than one third of the elders baby-sitting for their family members and more than one half are involved in helping to make family decisions. This study again emphasizes the importance of family to Latino culture and the willingness of elders to continue to give even when they themselves are in need.

Cultural Summary

The three cultures of the Native American, the Japanese, and the Latinos hold their elders in honor and respect and the elders play a part in the continuation of the cultural traditions. The Native American elder holds the place of storyteller and cares for
and nurtures the young of the tribe. The Japanese elder earns a place of respect due to years of long life experience but also holds the traditions and ceremonies of the culture for the young. The Latino elder holds the importance of family within the culture and serves as helper in decision making but also assists financially and with caring for the children.

These three cultures give some indication of what the tradition of honoring the older population has looked like and does look like in other cultures. These cultures have established traditions that created a desire by those aging within the culture to aspire to being recognized as elders. The American culture currently does not offer that kind of motivation.

*American Culture*

In the American culture, during colonial times, there were few men and women who lived a very long life, which at that time was 50 to 60 years or more. Those who did were considered to be blessed by God. These blessed were honored and respected because they were proof that the culture was conducive to long life and was favored by the Divine (Dychtwald, 1999). The older population was considered the source of advice for the young and, being the owners of the land, held both power and authority in the family. The family provided security, work, and hope of such status of power for all its members. Dychtwald stated that old age was so highly valued that both men and women tended to exaggerate how old they were when asked by others. It was common for people of all ages to actually want to appear to be older than they were.

This all changed with the advent of industrialization. A whole new set of priorities were introduced in the industrialization era. As Dychtwald (1999) stated
“youthful energy and mobility came to be prized over stability, experience, and homespun wisdom” (p. 10). The older population had no useful advice to offer this new era of industry. The old came to be seen as obstacles to progress and considered a social burden. The young men could now break free from the patriarchal structure of the family and were no longer dependent on their elders for economic security. Medical science dispelled the belief that living to an old age was by divine blessing. Wealth could buy any privilege that was at one time given to the older population. As Dychtwald commented, “From a rural, family-based lifestyle to an urban, workplace-oriented one; from divine selection to germ theory; from veneration to a growing disregard toward the old – the tipping of the social see-saw sent the status of the elderly plummeting” (p. 13).

This turn of events created an older population subjected in growing numbers to poverty and loneliness. Many lived out their lives in government institutions and asylums. It was not until 1935 when the Social Security Act was passed that the older population received some recognition and financial assistance. Another avenue of support came from the increasing practice of corporate pension plans. The GI Bill after World War II provided veterans with the opportunity for education or vocational training. In the 1960s Medicare supplied another financial boost. According to Dychtwald (1999) by 1999 men and women over 50 years of age controlled 80 percent of the total amount of money in United States savings-and-loan institutions as well as $66 out of every $100 that were invested in the stock market. This provided the basis for beginning to recognize this segment of the market as a viable player in the economy. However, even with this growth in financial status and market power, there still remained the negative perception of aging and the older population.
Post (2000) defined the American culture in terms of being "hypercognitive," by which he meant a culture and society that defines the dominant image of human fulfillment by self-control, independence, economic productivity, and cognitive enhancement. In a hypercognitive culture, to be deprived of one's ability to be in control, of being able to think one's way through life, is the most cruel of losses and one which carries a sense of shame and stigma. Post contrasted the American hypercognitive culture with the culture of China. He referred to anthropologist Charlotte Ikels who stated that in the Chinese culture there is a greater emphasis on the affective domain versus the cognitive domain. The Chinese view of human experience is greatly interdependent rather than the American focus of autonomy or independence. Due to this difference, the Chinese are more accepting of such aging diminishments as dementia or lack of cognitive ability.

Post (2000) claimed that in the American culture there is nothing as fearful as Alzheimer's Disease since it violates the very spirit of cognitive competence. In like manner, a hypercognitive culture that views human fulfillment in terms of self-control, independence, economic productivity, and cognitive enhancement would find it unacceptable to embrace the natural process of aging with the common aspects of diminishment and increased dependence. Being acculturated in this underlying philosophy it is understandable that this type of culture would want to put aside any visible indications that increased years would mean being less than humanly fulfilled. In an effort to protect oneself, it would be important to put down and discount those unfortunate enough to be affected by this deterioration. Out of this perspective would evolve the attitude of ageism.
Ageism

The term ageism was first used by R. N. Butler in 1969 to describe prejudice and discrimination that was directed toward older people. However, prejudice regarding age can be focused on any age group, such as children (DuBois & Miley, 2005). In 1995, Butler referred to ageism as the third major “ism” of our society, following racism and sexism (Rupp, Vodanovich, & Crede, 2005). Palmore extended the definition of ageism to involve not only prejudice and discrimination, but also stereotypes and attitudes which indicate processes both cognitive and affective in nature (as cited in Rupp et al.). Wolff (1998) defined ageism as a negative bias or an attitude based on stereotypes regarding aging and the older person. She outlines four factors that contribute to the negative stereotypes of aging: fear of death in Western society, emphasis on the youth culture in American society, emphasis in American culture on productivity, and the manner in which aging was originally researched in long-term care institutions. Ageism has specific effects from a societal perspective as it applies to older adults. As reported by DuBois and Miley, ageism “reduces their ability to contribute to the community at large, fosters stereotyping that makes it difficult to view older adults as individual people, encourages older adults to devalue themselves, and perpetuates a fear of aging” (p. 144).

Evidence of ageism exists in our culture. Dychtwald (1999) commented on the totality of our culture’s attempt to block out the concept of aging. He stated “I began to see that we had designed our modern world, top to bottom, to match the size, shape, and style of youth – from the height of the steps in our public buildings to the length of time it takes for traffic lights to change, from the size of the typeface in our newspapers and magazines to the auditory range in our telephones and televisions, from the age and style
of the models in advertisements to our embarrassment about our birthdays. In thousands of ways, over and over, we were being influenced to like what's young and dislike what's old” (p. xvi). Rupp et al. (2005) found in a sample of 554 undergraduate students at a public university that “men and younger individuals were significantly more ageist than women and older individuals” (p.359). Levy and Banaji defined implicit ageism as the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward older adults that exist and motivate without conscious awareness or control, and form the basis of most interactions with this population (as cited in Levy, 2001). A survey of implicit ageism reported by Banaji showed that 95% of those surveyed indicated they had negative views of old people (as cited in Levy). With the increase in the size of the older population and the dramatic change in the demographic profile of the American population, it is becoming paramount to consider the issue of ageism as it impacts the American culture. As Levy commented, “To eradicate ageism we need to become aware of not only the blatant forms of ageism, but also its more subtle forms that operate within us all, regardless of age or explicit views about equality” (p. 579).

Research on Ageism

Some studies have been conducted related to specific groups and their attitudes toward the older population. Stuart-Hamilton and Mahoney (2003) pre-tested two hundred British participants, with an age range of 18 to 80 years and varying degrees of contact with older adults in their occupations. The participants took an age awareness workshop, and then were tested a month after the session. The researchers found that the workshop increased the knowledge of the participants but did not change their negative attitudes toward the elderly. Gringart, Helmes, and Speelman (2005) in a study
conducted in Australia with 128 hiring decision-makers in private companies, found that negative stereotyping was the basis for age discrimination in hiring older workers.

As indicated by Dorfman, Murty, Ingram, Evans, and Power, (2004), one way to counter a stereotype is to get to know the individuals in the group versus the characterization of the group as a whole. One study which did indicate a positive change in attitudes toward the older population involved students who participated in an intergenerational service-learning project which connected older and younger generations in the community working together (Dorfman et al., 2004). Familiarity through contact with older people was the strongest element in changing ideas and attitudes, according to this study. From this research, the strongest element in eliminating ageism is getting to know the older population as individuals, not just a demographic subgroup.

Research on the Older Population

Research began to explore and describe many aspects of the world of the older population. A specific focus of research was identifying the factors of successful aging, such as health, activity, personal growth, and relationships (Knight & Ricciardelli, 2003; Menec, 2003) and what determines life satisfaction, such as health, social position, social interaction, and perceived control (Abu-Bader, Rogers, & Barusch, 2002; Bolmsjo, Sandman, & Andersson, 2006; Martin-Combs & Bayne-Smith, 2000; Sparks, Zehr, & Painter, 2004). Older adults described work or productive activities as those activities which provided meanings contributing to self-concept, of giving back to the community, and of helping them stay engaged (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005). Researchers were interested in how older adults maintained their independence (Yuen, Gibson, Yau, &
Mitcham, 2007), dealt with their fear of falling (Tischler & Hobson, 2005), and the part spirituality played in their lives (Dilworth-Anderson, Boswell, & Cohen, 2007).

Research showed that volunteering was beneficial to the well-being of older adults (Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyj, 2007). Along with volunteering, there was an interest in intergenerational programs as another avenue for the older population to interact with the community. Kuchne stated that the “goals of intergenerational contact are to improve children’s learning, reduce substance abuse, transform ageist attitudes, provide mentoring, decrease isolation, and build generational interdependence” (as cited in Salari, 2002). When the programs are initiated with one or more of these goals and the atmosphere is voluntary and monitored, the experience can be beneficial for both generations (Salari, 2002; Weintraub & Killian, 2007).

In early research efforts to learn about the older population, studies were conducted with staff and administrators of long term care facilities, believing the older population incapable of speaking for themselves. As time progressed and researchers ventured into interviewing older people, they found this population capable of giving appropriate and insightful responses. Over time it has become apparent that the views of the older population differ from what others expected them to think or say. Therefore, researchers have learned that if they want to gather valid and reliable information about the older population they need to include them in the process of doing research (Krause, 2002). Talking with older people in a nursing home or an assisted living facility has proven to be enlightening about the older population.

Tracy and DeYoung (2004) studied the experience of elderly individuals moving into an assisted living facility. This qualitative study gathered information from the
residents and provided valuable information that was helpful to future residents, the nursing staff, and to administrators. Heliker and Scholler-Jaquish (2006) stated “there is an urgency to understand the consumer’s perspective within the long-term care environment” (p. 34). In a study involving the relocation of elders to a new living situation after being hospitalized, Hersch, Spencer, and Kapoor (2003) stated that it is important to avoid making assumptions about how people will view their future possibilities. They learned that “most elders in this study also demonstrated openness to trying new experiences and new ways of doing things with positive expectations and with the recognition that new ways would be different from their familiar patterns” (p. 332). In a qualitative study in Sweden, Dwyer, Nordenfelt, and Ternestedt (2008) learned from three female nursing home residents that “inner strength can support a beneficial inner dialogue, the creation of meaning, or bearing a difficult situation” (p. 105). Researchers are recognizing the value of talking with and engaging the older population in research being done about them.

Theories of Aging

When theories of aging began to be developed it is not surprising that they evolved around the individual and productivity. Role Theory studied the various social roles persons played in their lifetime and how these changed with aging. Activity Theory attempted to explain the adjustments of the aging individual by the variety of productive roles and activities engaged in by the person. The more active the individual, the more satisfactory would be the aging process. Disengagement Theory posited that the older person pulled away from the activities of society in order to engage in the development of their inner life (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2005).
These theories viewed everyone in the older population as if each person was the same. The focus on roles, activity, and disengagement appear to be grounded in the underlying philosophy mentioned earlier that defined American culture as hypercognitive. Having been acculturated to view individuals as self-controlled, independent, economically productive, and cognitively competent, a theory of aging would focus on areas where the individual was meeting or not meeting these areas of importance in human fulfillment. It was through the research being conducted, the emerging view of social interaction, and the person-environment perspective that new theories were formed that recognized the individuality of each aging person (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2005). The study of social interaction and exchange produced theories such as the Symbolic Interactionist Theory and Labeling Theory. These theories looked at older people as individuals whose social involvement, along with factors in their environment, affected their aging process. It became recognized that each person determined their own aging journey. Along with this realization, research began to further clarify that the older population had gifts to offer as they aged. The process of aging could be viewed more positively in light of these findings.

**Positive Aging**

Aging is a natural process that is influenced by how a person lives and the environment and relationships that have helped to shape that person’s life and personality. Hooyman and Kiyak (2005) presented the concept of active aging. It is based on the principle of optimization by which all aspects of the individual’s life is regarded as a means of enhancing one’s quality of life during the aging process. This would include recognizing what the individual has to offer at all stages of life.
Schachter-Shalomi and Miller (1995) presented the concept of conscious aging. This is a process engaged in by those who exercise the ability of self-reflection to consider their development in life and to explore preparation for death. This time of inner growth produces the wise elder or sage. As Schachter-Shalomi and Miller stated, these elders “trail-blaze unmarked paths that lead to an exciting and fulfilling future. These pioneers represent a new shoot on the Tree of Life. As members of humanity’s vanguard who devote the afternoon of life to developing their full human potential, they look upon aging as a developmental process whose goal is an ever-widening expansion of consciousness and a growing sense of unity with life” (p. 15).

The belief in positive outcomes to aging was further supported by the theory of gerotranscendence. Tornstam, who formulated this theory in 1989, viewed gerotranscendence as the final phase of a natural process which carries the individual into maturity and wisdom. Tornstam posited through the theory of gerotranscendence that the person comes to experience a “new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe” (as cited in Schriver, 2004, p. 215). This feeling is manifested through a redefinition of time, space, life, death, and self. The individual’s perspective on reality changes, not only with regard to environment but also with regard to self. This process happens for everyone but at different times and will be affected by life circumstances. Those who are able to successfully navigate this process experience a high degree of self-controlled social activity, a high degree of life satisfaction, a high degree of self-acceptance, and more satisfaction with their social activities. The well-being of these individuals is less dependent on social activities and they display more active and
complex coping patterns. This process allows these individuals to look forward and outward, having attained a new view of self and the world (as cited in Schriver).

There have been some attempts to define what positive aging could look like in our culture. One of those attempts was crafted by The Live Oak Institute and presented by Schachter-Shalomi and Miller (1995) in their book *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*. The definition reads:

"An Elder is a person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential and whose life continues to have within it promise for, and connection to the future. An Elder is still in pursuit of happiness, joy and pleasure, and her or his birthright to these remains intact. Moreover, an Elder is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work it is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generations" (pp. 14-15).

This definition implies two parts, the development of the person and the person’s outreach into society in terms of a legacy to future generations. The personal transformation is an individual commitment to growth and development and to life long learning. The outreach into society has yet to be developed in the fullness of potential for creative opportunities for older adults from society itself.

Volunteering has become a popular and available opportunity for the older population to become involved in what is happening on the community level (Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyj, 2007). Volunteer opportunities include mentoring, assisting in schools, being members on boards, visiting the homebound, being a driver for those who have no transportation, helping at food pantries
or service centers, teaching classes at Senior Centers, being a friendly visitor at a nursing home, and taking care of elderly neighbors. There are volunteer opportunities posted in the newspaper and on websites. If someone was serious about finding a way to be involved in the community there are many avenues for doing just that.

Besides volunteering there have been other suggestions for the older population that would make them visible in the community. Dychtwald and Flower (1990) proposed the creation of an organized national Elder Corps. They envisioned this organization to be like the Peace Corps, a channel for the time, energy, love, and experience which exists in the older population. This would be an opportunity for older people to express what they feel they can do for young people, for their communities, and for one another. The Elder Corps would be a means of bringing interested Elders together to discuss ways they can use their knowledge and talents. Examples of Elder Corps work are the Life Enrichment Services program in Atlanta which provides older people with an array of useful services, the volunteer service credit program which allows volunteers to clock their hours on the computer and use credits of time given to be helped in their time of need, and the possibility of providing such needed services as a library or a new classroom using donated funds. All of these programs could be channeled through the Elder Corps.

Freedman (1999) indicated in his book *Prime Time* many ways in which the older population is taking part in community efforts. He described the process of establishing the Experience Corps, a program open to everyone over age fifty that would strive to confront community issues that were determined to be real problems that were of
significance to the community. The success of this program has reinforced Freedman's belief that the older population is a valuable and essential resource to American society.

Another focus for the energy and creativity of the older population was presented by Schachter-Shalomi and Miller (1995). They believed that the elders hold the future of our planet in their hands. "As an integral part of their mission to build the future, elders need to foster a renewed relationship with our devastated planet Earth. They can help us relate to the natural world not as an economic resource to exploit, but as the life-giving source of our physical and spiritual well-being" (p. 229). Schachter-Shalomi and Miller suggested that the elders will be the group that can redirect our attitudes toward the planet and find the ways and means to get us back on track, working with nature instead of against, and begin to renew the planet and bring it back to a place of beauty and life.

Leder (1997) discussed the concept of a Council of Elders which is the coming together of a group of elders both for the purpose of developing themselves as elders and finding ways they can be of service to the community. The council meets on a regular basis and develops a set of ceremonies or rituals to help promote the growth and awareness of awakening the inner wisdom of an elder and finding ways to share that wisdom with one another and then society. The meetings are usually held with the members seated in a circle in the order of their age. There is a "talking stick" which is passed to each person as they take the floor to speak. A sense of honor and respect is instilled in the members as they recognize the wisdom of the words of each member as the "talking stick" passes from one to another. The respect and honor learned in the Council of Elders can then be transmitted beyond the circle to the community at large.
In considering the growth of the aging population, one particular cohort stands out. The baby-boom cohort consists of 76 million individuals born between the years 1946-1964. This generation is a large segment of the wave of older adults evolving within American society (Dychtwald & Flower, 1990). There is much speculation about what this group will mean for the American culture and, specifically, for the place of older adults in the American culture (Longino, 2005). Freedman (2007) focused on the baby-boom generation in his book *Encore: Finding Work That Matters in the Second Half of Life*. Freedman defined an encore career as work taken on in one’s second half of life. This work tends to go beyond making money just to make ends meet but shifts priorities to work that is meaningful and satisfying. This new vision of work for the baby-boomers, according to Freedman, seeks to “break through to a new era of individual and social renewal, to ride the wave of longevity and health toward a future that works better for all generations” (p. 12). The movement of the baby-boomers into the older generation holds the promise of a positive movement toward recognizing the potential that can and does exist in older adults.

**Summary**

The culture one lives in provides the environment in which one develops a worldview. A perspective on the process of aging and the meaning of old is part of this worldview. Cultures do exist that exemplify the tradition of honoring older adults. Three examples looked at in this literature review were the Native American culture, the Japanese culture, and the Latino culture. The American culture in general, however, has evolved a negative attitude toward aging and exhibits ageism with regard to the older population. Research on older adults began to indicate there were positive aspects to
aging and promoted a more positive perspective toward the older population. Attempts are being made to look at the process of aging as a positive experience and to recognize the potential resource the older population could be to the American culture.

The older population has something to give to American culture through their resources of experience, knowledge, wisdom, and history. They have stories to tell the young and advice to give those who are struggling. They have hope for survival and meaning from suffering. They have ingenuity, competence, and integrity. They have questions to ask and opinions to give. They have a broader picture from years of moving forward. They have a perspective to give that no one else can provide. They have a stability of purpose and a resilience tried by long life experience. As a society, the question remains, can we continue to ignore the potential resource available to us through the older population?

In the wake of the growth of the older population Dychtwald (1999) expressed the potential for creative and compelling new phases of life, but also the possibility for untold disaster in all aspects of society. The American culture is faced with making some choices about what direction to take. The purpose of this research was to give some direction as to what might be possible if the challenge is accepted to look for positive ways to incorporate the gifts and potential of the older population. The results of this study provide some indication of what it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in the American culture.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

This qualitative research study explored what would need to take place in American culture to create the tradition of honoring the older population. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, no formal hypotheses were formulated before the research. The research sample consisted of 15 participants who were chosen by the researcher because of their current occupation, past work in the field with the older population, their involvement in a project which viewed the older population as a subgroup in the total population, or because they were a member of the older population. Each participant was personally invited by the researcher to be interviewed for this study. The interviews took place from February 2008 through April 2008. Human Research Review Committee Approval was obtained from Grand Valley State University. The approval letter and the consent form for this study can be found in Appendix A.

This chapter will present the methodology used to gather information on what it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture. The chapter will begin with a statement of the research questions, followed by a discussion of the sampling method and procedure, and the demographic characteristics of the participants. Also included in this chapter is a description of the data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Questions

The interview for this qualitative study consisted of ten open ended questions. The guiding question of the research was “What would it take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture?” For this thesis, four questions out of the remaining nine questions were selected to provide support for answering the
guide question. The five questions to be analyzed in this paper are presented below in the order in which the findings will be reported.

1.) How do you feel the older population in general is treated in American society?

2.) What evidence, if any, do you see of the older population being valued in American society?

3.) If we did have the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture, what do you think would be some of the benefits for society?

4.) What would it take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture?

5.) What do you think would be some steps we could take now to begin to establish the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture?

*Sample*

The sampling method used was nonprobability purposive sampling. Each participant was selected on the basis of being a member of the older population, of working with or volunteering for the older population, or of working in a field or on a project that considered the older population as a group within the American culture. Attention was given to gender, ethnicity, and macro/mezzo/micro level of experience with the older population.

A total of 15 participants completed the interview for this research. In the study sample there were eleven women and four men. The ages of the participants ranged from 40 to 87 with four in the 40s, three in the 50s, five in the 60s, one in the 70s, and two in the 80s. Ethnicity for this sample was predominantly White (11), with two African American participants, one Vietnamese participant, and one Latino participant.
Twelve of the fifteen participants were still working, with three not working. Of those who were working, seven had a job at the micro level as counselors (2), clergy (1), and a customer service associate (1). Five worked at the mezzo level as college professors. Three worked at the macro level as CEOs (2) and an academic Dean (1). The fields of practice were primarily social work (4), nursing (4), and administration (3). There were two participants in the field of psychology, one in insurance, and one in lifelong learning. Of the fifteen participants, two identified themselves as being in the older population, five were currently working with the older population, six have worked with the older population, and three have volunteered with the older population. Appendix B provides a table of the demographic data.

Data Collection

The data were collected using an interview consisting of ten questions. Each participant was invited personally by the researcher by phone or in person to participate in the study. Verbal consent was attained at the time of the request and a time and place were established for the interview. The interviews were conducted by the researcher at the participant’s home, place of work, or a suitable place convenient for the participant.

Prior to the interview, the participants received by mail or email the interview questions and a short demographic survey. In the accompanying letter, the participants were thanked for their willingness to participate, requested to fill out the demographic survey before the interview, reminded of the time and place of the interview, and offered the opportunity to review the questions prior to the set time. The letter also reminded the participant that the interview would be tape recorded. A copy of the letter, the interview questions, and the demographic survey are in Appendix C.
At the time of the interview, participants were asked to give their written consent to be interviewed and to have the interview tape recorded. The purpose of the study was explained and the process of the interview reviewed. The participants were assured there would be no risks to them in participating in the research. They were informed that they were free to withdraw at any time or decline from answering any of the questions. Confidentiality was explained. They would not be identified in any reports and all records and tapes would be marked with a participant number only. All data would only be reported as group data and any quotations used would not be identified as to the participant. All data would be kept in the researcher’s possession in a locked cabinet. All data would be destroyed within 3-5 years after the completion of the study.

The interview consisted of ten questions which were centered around the main research question of What would it take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture? Other questions included how the participant felt the older population is treated in American society, how the tradition of honoring the older population would benefit society, and what steps could be taken to create such a tradition. The interview was tape recorded with a cassette recorder with an internal microphone. The interview averaged 37 minutes in length with a range in time from 17 minutes to 63 minutes. The demographic survey consisted of six questions. The questions included age, work status which included job title and responsibilities, work/volunteer experience with the older population, field of practice, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Data collection took place from February 2008 through April 2008. The audio tapes were transcribed June 2008 through August 2008. The transcriber was instructed in
the confidentiality expectations and agreed to comply with keeping the tapes and transcripts in a locked container. Transcripts were emailed to the researcher upon completion. The transcripts were randomly checked for accuracy by the researcher. All tapes were returned to the researcher after transcription and stored in a locked container.

Data Analysis Procedures

The demographic surveys were collated manually. The transcripts were analyzed using the qualitative process of content analysis. The interviews were coded manually and in several steps. Each transcript was read through and coded with attention to the question being answered. After all fifteen interviews were coded, each question was examined over all 15 interviews. A second set of codes was prepared from the codes for each question. From the second set of codes, themes were determined and the codes were grouped under the themes. The codes were numbered and the original responses for each interview were marked with the corresponding number from the code scheme. The codes were then counted and tabulated to determine the responses most often given and the themes most frequently mentioned. To clarify the themes, quotes were selected from the interview transcripts as examples of the responses given under that theme. These example responses will be included in the reporting of the results.
Chapter Four - Results

The interview for this qualitative study consisted of ten open ended questions. The guiding question of the research was “What would it take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture?” For this thesis, four questions were selected from the remaining nine questions to provide the basis for answering the guiding question. Through content analysis, themes were discerned from the responses to these five questions. For the results, the themes will be reported for the five questions and supported by quotes given by the participants. A table displaying the themes will be supplied before the presentation of each question.

The five questions are presented in a designated sequence. The first question requested the participants to explain how they felt the older population in general is treated in American society. The second question asked for evidence, if any, that the participants see of the older population being valued in American society. The third question in the sequence asked the participants to consider what some of the benefits would be for society if the tradition of honoring the older population existed in American culture. The fourth question was the guide question asking what it would take to create such a tradition. The fifth and final question presented in this thesis requested that the participants identify some steps that could be taken now to begin to establish the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture. Following are the results from these questions.

*Question One – Treatment in General of the Older Population*

Table 1 gives the themes for question one and the number of responses and participants who responded in each theme.
Table 1 – Question One: How do you feel the older population in general is treated in American society?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Responses N=82</th>
<th>Participants N=15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Treatment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devalued</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast Aside</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated Unkindly</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth More Valued</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential of Older Adults Disregarded</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Media</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Quality of Care</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageism in the Work Place</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Treatment</strong></td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Regard</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 15 participants gave a total of 82 responses to the question “How do you feel the older population in general is treated in American society?” Of the total, 78% (64) of the responses referred to negative treatment while 22% (18) referred to positive treatment. The main themes for negative treatment were: 1) Devalued (20%, 16 responses), 2) Cast Aside (18%, 15 responses), 3) Treated Unkindly (15%, 12 responses), and 4) Youth More Valued (10%, 8 responses). Nine of the 15 participants gave responses in the Devalued theme. These responses included being devalued, made fun of, looked down upon, and being looked at as a burden. For the Cast Aside theme, eleven of the 15 participants gave responses. Responses of this theme included being cast aside, being put in facilities, being marginalized, and treated as if being invisible. Eight of the 15 participants gave responses in the Treated Unkindly theme, which included being treated not generally positive, neglected, treated unkindly, and taken for granted. The Youth More Valued theme was mentioned by six of the 15 participants and included statements about the American culture being a culture for young people.
There were nine participants who mentioned ways in which they felt the older population was held in Positive Regard (22%, 18 responses). These comments were made in response to the question asking how the older population in general is treated in American society. These comments included the special advantages set aside for seniors, statements that "ethnic" families hold the older adult in high regard, the generous treatment of volunteers, and that some older adults are held in high regard with special mention of those who are wealthy and have some authority. The following are some quotes given by participants in response to question one.

"...so in general, I think a lot of older people feel they are cast aside and not necessarily very highly valued, but I think it...it certainly varies from person to person, and so there may be trends, one way or another but certainly many people devalue older adults considerably and they make fun of and don’t want to think about older people...”

"We tend to become invisible the older we get. And if we are noticed, it is more, more with condescension, or with annoyance, because we often are slower or in the way of progress and activity.”

"I do believe that the general population treats the elders very poorly. They don’t have the value, especially from the younger people, and I believe some places in society, they poke fun at the elders...”

"Constantly diminished because it’s a culture for the young people, fed and nurtured. And the older population coming along from what has been in the past and old attitudes and diminishing attitudes and neglected...”

"And I still see where the elderly population is revered. That there’s a respect still for the elderly population in this culture. And that there is still an opportunity for the elderly to make a contribution. That’s my perception.”

*Question Two – The Older Population Being Valued*

Table 2 provides the themes for question two and the number of responses and participants who responded in each theme.
Table 2 – Question Two: What evidence, if any, do you see of the older population being valued in American society?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Responses N=68</th>
<th>Participants N=15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational Interaction</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the Family</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As Part of the Community</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services Provided for Older Adults</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition Given</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revered for Personal Qualities</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Programs for Older Adults</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 68 responses were given by the 15 participants to the question “What evidence, if any, do you see of the older population being valued in American society?” The main themes for the older population being valued in American society were through: 1) Intergenerational Interaction (19%, 13 responses), 2) Within the Family (16%, 11 responses), 3) As Part of the Community (16%, 11 responses), and the 4) Services Provided for Older Adults (16%, 11 responses). Seven of the 15 participants gave responses in the Intergenerational Interaction theme. These responses included individual relationships, working with students, and programs like Grandbuddies and Traveling Grannies. For the Within the Family theme, eight of the 15 participants gave responses. Responses for this theme included caring about family members, families planning for the presence of older adults, and caring for grandchildren. Six of the participants gave responses in the As Part of the Community theme, which included valuing volunteers, recruiting retirees for service within the community, and older adults sitting on community boards. The Services Provided for Older Adults theme was mentioned by four of the 15 participants and included statements about specific benefits for seniors such as transportation, housing, free/close parking spaces, and discounts at
movies and other establishments. The following are some quotes given by participants in response to question two.

"We have another one called Grandbuddies Program, and we match older people up with 4th grade students...and the kids write about it, too, and they say things like, you know, it helps them to be able to talk with their own grandparents, and they don't get to see their own grandparents very often, so they really appreciated having someone older in their life..."

"People still look at elderly for advice, for words of wisdom.... So I see them being valued in the home, still in the home. You..., there's a respect for what they have to say even if you don't take it in. You let them have their voice."

"And I think, also, you know, there's kind of a movement that's come up in the last few years...the civic ventures, the recognizing people who give back. So there is a segment of society at least, I'm not sure how deeply it's penetrated, that does recognize that there are things that older people do that do contribute..."

"I, I think that the, the things that I notice as an older person is that I can go to the movies for less money. I can park close to the door at the library. Those things are important to me. And those are advantages that I get only because I'm old."

**Question Three – Benefits to American Society for Honoring the Older Population**

Table 3 provides the themes for question three and the number of responses and participants who responded in each theme.

Table 3 – Question Three: If we did have the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture, what do you think would be some of the benefits for society?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Responses N=63</th>
<th>Participants N=15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older Population Enriching Society</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A More Caring Society</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Positive Change in Social Values</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prevention of Social Problems Among Youth</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older People Engaged in Community</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Older Population Would be Valued</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Positive Attitude Toward Aging</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the question “If we did have the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture, what do you think would be some of the benefits for society?,” the 15 participants gave a total of 63 responses. The main themes for these responses were:

1) Older Population Enriching Society (27%, 17 responses),
2) A More Caring Society (19%, 12 responses),
3) A Positive Change in Social Values (16%, 10 responses),

Five of the 15 participants gave responses regarding the Older Population Enriching Society theme. These responses included enriching society with their knowledge and experience, having the input of older adults, gaining their wisdom, and having their experience in the workplace. For the A More Caring Society theme, six of the 15 participants gave responses. Responses in this theme included more tolerance, more acceptance, a sense of gratitude, and a society driven by caring not capital.

Six of the participants gave responses for the theme A Positive Change in Social Values, which included a change in core values, a better sense of community, help would be there to get through difficult times, and time would be taken by society for important things. The Prevention of Social Problems Among Youth theme was mentioned by three of the 15 participants and included statements about older adults being motivators to young people to get them involved, mentoring young people, keeping young people from dropping out of school, and being a stabilizing force for the younger generation. The following are some quotes given by participants in response to question three.

“And I think older people, some, not all, achieve a state where they are more able to see the possibilities, not just the negatives but the possibilities in a situation. They’ve learned to go with the flow, to respond to what seems to be a negative thing. Well, maybe there’s another way we can look at it...that could be more incorporated into our society, and I think that it would be richer.”
“Society in general would be a very caring society. They would not be like, oh hurry up and get out of my way. That’s what we are today. And it would be a much more pleasant and cheerful place to be.”

“I mean, there is so much older people have to offer, and we don’t even open our minds to what that is. We get impatient because they talk a little slower, don’t hear as well, and we don’t want to include them in what we are doing. But if we were to find a way to do that better, and to slow things down, and that’s a whole other thing. Our society moves so fast, and maybe that would be a benefit, that things could slow down a little bit and we could take a little bit more time to do what is important... take the time to listen to what people have to say and include different perspectives in what we are doing. So I mean, I think that the big thing is including older people’s wisdom and experience and knowledge versus totally ignoring them.”

“...for a young person to have somebody that is an older adult that cares for them, that would be a wonderful thing, and I think would probably help keep some of these kids from taking the paths they do of dropping out or, you know, getting pregnant... Those kinds of mentoring relationships could help kids perhaps from going bad.”

*Question Four – Creating the Tradition of Honoring the Older Population*

Table 4 gives the themes for question four and the number of responses and participants who responded in each theme.
The guiding question for this research was “What do you think it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture?” The 15 participants gave a total of 96 responses to this question. The themes of these responses were classified as micro level, mezzo level, or macro level themes. The explanations of these three levels as used for this research were those given by DuBois and Miley (2005). The micro level was explained as working with individuals either separately or in families or small groups. The mezzo or midlevel involved interacting with groups in a formal manner and working with complex organizations such as agencies, educational systems, and health care organizations. The macro level included interactions with neighborhoods, communities, and societies with the specific goal to achieve social change.
For question four there were a total of 14 themes which were classified into three themes for the micro level (27%, 26 responses), five themes for the mezzo level (32%, 31 responses), and six themes for the macro level (41%, 39 responses). The main themes for this question were: 1) Change in Society, a macro level theme (14%, 13 responses); 2) Change in Older Adults, micro level (13%, 12 responses); 3) Education, mezzo level (11%, 11 responses); 4) Change in Every Individual, micro level (10%, 10 responses); and 5) A Revolution, macro level (10%, 10 responses). Six of the 15 participants gave responses in the Change in Society theme. These responses included providing ways older adults can feel useful/belong, recognize and acknowledge older adults politically, and talking with older adults about the knowledge they have of the city and history. For the Change in Older Adults theme, eight of the 15 participants gave responses. Responses for this theme included older adults must prove themselves to be useful; older people must be more self-sufficient; older people must be more insistent; and older adults need to consider themselves as pioneers of aging. Six of the 15 participants mentioned Education as a theme, which included educating younger people about being old, talking about life being impermanent/about death, and teaching the children about aging.

Six of the participants gave responses in the Change in Every Individual theme. These responses included needing a tradition of respect, the tradition starts with each individual, and helping each other/being supportive. Four of the 15 participants mentioned creating the tradition of honoring the older population would take A Revolution. Responses in this theme included needing a movement like that for civil rights, needing a change in society’s core values, and policy changes. The following are some quotes given by participants in response to question four.
“But I do think that as a society we need to find ways in which people can feel useful their whole life, with whatever physical and cognitive abilities they have, and so, that’s the part of society I think we’ve got to start changing our ideas, changing in the workplace, about when people retire.”

“Alright, I said if seniors could be presented as pioneers of aging, and openly expose and share their contentment as well as their challenges, not especially for the purpose of new and improved medical procedures, but with the idea that the general public, all of whom hate and deny old age, could be positively impacted about the realities of the last years. It would be a useful service…”

“So I think that we would have to, we have to start very young. There is research that shows that stereotypes about aging are formed by the time children are 4 or 5 years old. So we would have to start in daycare centers, in churches, and in our education system. It would have to start very, very young.”

“You know, I think if there is, that it’s just the tradition of just respect. And if we are going to set up anything it would be to recognize the value that, the value of life in general, whether it is an elderly person or a newborn, that there is a contribution that that elderly person can give. That sort of tradition then could be of value, a principle, of honor and respect. And lend a voice to that person.”

“I would say that’s the, that’s the type of movement we need, you know, civil rights. Civil rights were for the children to the elderly. I mean it should be for everyone. So it needs to be part of policy and it needs to be part of what we teach in a course in the universities, in schools. It’s a big long process.”

*Question Five – Steps to Take Now to Establish the Tradition*

Table 5 gives the themes for question five and the number of responses and participants who responded in each theme.
Table 5 – Question Five: What do you think would be some steps we could take now to begin to establish the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide Opportunities for Older Adults to Have a Voice in Society</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>N=79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Older People Accept Their Dignity and Worth</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate Older Adults</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Changes in the Media/Market That are Positive Toward Older Adults</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a Social Awareness of Older People As a Part of Society</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate/Support Intergenerational Programs for Old and Young</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Changes in the Work Place to Accommodate the Older Population</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate/Support Programs That Promote Positive Aging</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 15 participants gave a total of 79 responses to the question “What do you think would be some steps we could take now to begin to establish the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture?” The main themes in the responses to question five were: 1) Provide Opportunities for Older Adults to Have a Voice in Society (23%, 18 responses), 2) Help Older People Accept Their Dignity and Worth (19%, 15 responses), 3) Celebrate Older Adults (15%, 12 responses), and 4) Make Changes in the Media/Market That are Positive Toward Older Adults (11%, 9 responses). Nine of the 15 participants gave responses in the Provide Opportunities for Older Adults to Have a Voice in Society theme. These responses included sponsor talk shows with older adult representation, make the aged population more visible, make relationships with older adults a part of schooling/church/society, and provide representation of older adults in other areas of society. For the Help Older People Accept Their Dignity and Worth theme, six of the 15 participants gave responses. Responses for this theme
included creating relationships, providing opportunities for older adults to be together, providing educational opportunities about the aging process, and helping older adults to recognize that the aging process makes them a treasure to society.

Five of the 15 participants gave responses for the Celebrate Older Adults theme. These responses included make a special day for older adults, find ways in society to celebrate age, have a periodic celebration in each city, and promote birthdays as a celebration of the person’s life. The Make Changes in the Media/Market That are Positive Toward Older Adults theme was mentioned by six of the 15 participants. Statements in this theme included eliminate cards/books that poke fun at age, use mass media to educate the public and present opportunities for older adults, promote positive views of aging, and work with the market to change what it drives. The following are some quotes given by participants in response to question five.

“...it seems like people are very interested in listening to talk shows of various kinds these days, and I think it would be good to, to have whatever is currently being used as a nationally, a national reach out and touch the population, the general population, that there should be some kind of a, an inclusion of, of older adult representation in that type of activity...so that, so that there would be some way of beginning to recognize and become accustomed to regularly hearing those voices and that kind of discussion.”

“We should provide opportunities, of course again for them to be more self-sufficient and to be helpful in society. Of course, give them opportunity to be together...if they can do, they are willing to do. But if they are not willing to do, they don’t have to do anything about it. But if something good will happen, it will happen for them. Provide educational opportunity about aging process for them. The older they get, they get the Alzheimer’s disease, forgetfulness, how to deal with it...”

“Well, we celebrate everything else except the older people, and, you know, those kid’s days and everything else, but we do not have a special day. There is a Grandparent’s Day, but that just goes like by, and nobody even mentions it, you know, that they’d honored a grandparent, you know, that it’s just a day on the calendar, but no, no hoop-dee-doo, making it special. You know, we have to do something to make it special.”
"But I think that kind of a lobbying effort or maybe not lobbying, just call it education with ads on TV... But I think that if we could do something in the mass media to say here we are..."

Summary

In summary, the 15 participants identified both positive and negative treatment of older adults in American society. The benefits to society for establishing the tradition of honoring the older population included the older population enriching society, a positive change in social values, and the prevention of social problems among the youth of America. Establishing the tradition of honoring the older population, according to the 15 participants, would involve change on all three of the social levels: micro, mezzo, and macro. The micro level included change in every individual, change in older adults, and change in the family. Change on the mezzo level included change in education, the work place, in church support, and provision for intergenerational programs. Change on the macro level included change in society, a revolution, change in the media, societal recognition of older adults, and change in technology. Some steps that the participants felt could be taken now to establish this tradition included providing opportunities for older adults to have a voice in society and helping older adults accept the dignity and worth to be given to them.
Chapter Five - Discussion

This qualitative research study explored what it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture. Culture was defined as "a complex system and process of shared knowledge, beliefs, traditions, symbols, language, art, and social organizations" (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2005, p. 527). In order to provide a representative cross section as much as possible within the American culture, the 15 participants were specifically selected to be part of the study. To reflect the complex nature of society the research sample included males and females, four races or ethnicities, employed and unemployed, a range of ages, and representation from the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of society.

Cultural Tradition of Honoring Older Adults

Three examples of the tradition of honoring the older population within a culture were selected as a basis for discussing the results of this research. The three cultures of the Native American, the Japanese, and the Latinos give some indication of what the tradition of honoring the older population has looked like and does look like in other cultures. These cultures incorporated established traditions that created a desire by those aging within the culture to aspire to being recognized as elders. The American culture currently does not offer that kind of motivation.

The three culture groups including Native Americans, the Japanese, and Latinos hold their elders in honor and respect and the elders play a part in the continuation of the cultural traditions. The Native American elder holds the place of storyteller and cares for and nurtures the young of the tribe (Baldridge, 2001; Schwietzer, 1999; & Weibel-Orlando, 1989). The Japanese elder earns a place of respect due to years of long life
experience but also holds the traditions and ceremonies of the culture for the young (Maeda & Ishikawa, 1999; Palmore & Maeda, 1985; & Traphagan, 2004). The Latino elder holds the importance of family within the culture and serves as helper in decision making but also assists financially and with caring for the children (Chiriboga, 2004; Dietz, 1995; & Sotomayor, 1989).

The 15 participants in this research study responded that creating the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture would take change in many aspects of American society, as well as society as a whole. Of interest, the changes suggested also included change on the part of the older population as well. The participants recognized that the older population would need to be prepared to be the role models and storytellers that are the trademarks of elders in other cultures. As society changes to accept the knowledge, experience, and wisdom of the older population, the older population must be prepared to offer those qualities, abilities, and talents to society.

The older population has been acculturated, along with the rest of American society, in a “hypercognitive” culture (Post, 2000). The older population has accepted the belief of a “hypercognitive” culture that once self-control, independence, economic productivity, and cognitive enhancement have diminished, an individual is no longer a fully functional human being. This belief needs to be challenged in light of the new research and medical advancements that propose the reality of fully functioning human beings into the later years and potentially until the last breath is taken (Cohen, 2005). Besides fully functioning, the older population has a greater potential for creative expression due to long life experience (Cohen, 2000). As the participants mentioned,
there is a need for education, on both the part of society at large and the older population as to the gifts and benefits of aging.

*Common Themes*

Across the five questions analyzed there were common themes mentioned. The theme most often mentioned had to do with the potential of the older population. In question one, the participants noted that the potential of older adults is disregarded in society. In question two, the older adults are revered for their personal qualities. In question three, one of the benefits of honoring the older population was the fact the older population will enrich society. In question four, the older adults need to change to recognize what they have to offer. In question five, the most often mentioned step to take was to provide opportunities for the older adults to have a voice in society. The results suggested that the older population has something to give to the American culture. Their knowledge, experience, wisdom, and talents are mentioned as sources of benefit and enrichment. These qualities for the most part are currently hidden and need to be recognized by older adults, as well as society, in order to be accessed and utilized for the benefit of all. All three cultures used as examples of honoring the older population, recognized the gifts of the elders and saw those gifts as viable parts of the functioning of their society (Baldridge, 2001; Palmore & Maeda, 1985; Sotomayor, 1989).

A second common theme was that of giving recognition to the older adult in American culture. In question one the results indicated that the older population is cast aside, while the positive evidence finds them occasionally recognized. In question three the older population would be valued and in question four, every individual must have a positive change of attitude toward older adults. In question five a step to be taken was to
celebrate older adults. With our current culture of anti-aging and fear of death, it would be a radical change to celebrate older adults and give positive recognition for being older. The act of giving recognition was especially noted in the Japanese culture with the Respect for Elders Day established for honoring the elders (Palmore & Maeda, 1985).

The third common theme was that of intergenerational programs and interaction between older adults and the younger populations, particularly with children. In the first question, the results indicated that the youth are more valued than the older adults. In the second question, evidence of the older population being valued was most often mentioned through intergenerational interaction. In question three, the tradition of honoring the older population would benefit society by providing the means for preventing social problems among youth. In question four, two ways of creating the tradition of honoring the older population were having the older adults helping in schools and creating intergenerational programs and interaction. In question five, one of the steps mentioned was to initiate and support intergenerational programs for the old and the young. Results would indicate that the older population has something to offer the young and there need to be avenues created for that interaction to take place. In all three cultures used to examine the tradition of honoring the older population, teaching, mentoring, and being role models for the youth were critical aspects of the elders function in the culture. This research recognized these actions as viable contributions for older adults in the American culture.

*Three Levels of Social Interaction*

In the American culture the three levels of social interaction were identified as needing change for the tradition to become a reality. Results indicated that every part of
American society needs to examine the role it plays in defining how the older population is viewed and treated in American culture. On the micro level there would need to be change in every individual, on the part of the older adults, and within the family. On the mezzo level there would need to be change in education, the work place, church, and intergeneration opportunities. On the macro level society as a whole would need to change its values, in the manner of a revolution, as well as change how the media portrays older adults and how older adults are recognized and honored.

The concept of a social revolution holds some important implications for the older population. Freire (1993) defined revolution as the liberation of the oppressed to have the freedom to experience the potential of being fully human. He believed that all human beings had the right to be fully humanized. This process of humanization included the opportunity to use talents and abilities to their full creative potential. Freire believed that essential to the liberation of the oppressed was an understanding of their worldview. The revolution was successfully accomplished by motivating the oppressed to act from their own perspective, reaching toward what is rightfully theirs. When the oppressed themselves carry the revolution the result is a success for all involved. The change is enacted from the inside out.

The results of this research supported Freire’s (1993) view of social revolution. Examining and articulating the worldview of the older population would empower older adults and enlighten and educate society. By empowering older adults, they will be more apt to move into visible roles within society and society will be encouraged to provide opportunities for this to occur. Education, interaction, and empowerment were aspects indicated by this research as steps to establishing the tradition of honoring the older
population. Freedman (1999) reported the “quiet revolution” which is currently taking place through the interaction and contributions of older adults in programs that are providing opportunities for giving back to the community. Research is needed to explore and describe the worldview of older adults, and to further define the benefits and potential of the aging process.

As overwhelming as a social revolution may seem, it also provides many options for beginning points. The two most frequently mentioned areas for first steps were providing opportunities for older adults to have a voice in society and helping older adults to accept their dignity and worth. The results indicated that creating the tradition of honoring the older population is a two sided venture. Not only must society do its part to open the pathways for new attitudes and behavior, but the older population must rise to the occasion. With the current acculturation of older adults, believing that society perceives them as worthless, the older adults need to accept themselves as worthy of being honored. For the tradition to take hold in American culture, both movements, change in society and change in older adults, would need to take place simultaneously.

Summary

In summary, creating the tradition of honoring the older population in American society will take a social revolution. This revolution involves the empowerment of older adults to accept the potential of their knowledge, experience, and wisdom, as well as society providing opportunities for older adults to share their talents and gifts within society. There were three common themes across the five questions. These themes were that the older population has something to give to the American culture, older adults need
to be recognized for what they have to offer society, and intergenerational programs and interaction are viable ways to engage older adults and use their potential.

The social revolution would affect the three levels of social interaction: micro, mezzo, and macro. At all levels of society the change required focuses on society accepting, recognizing, and engaging older adults. At the same time older adults must realize their own potential and become empowered to accept a voice within society.

Limitations

In discussing generalizability, one limitation for this study was the small sample size which makes the generalization to a larger population unfeasible. The participants were not randomly selected but were specifically chosen for this study, having met certain criteria. The designated set of criteria was being a member of the older population, having volunteered for or worked with the older population, or having been involved in a project which viewed the older population as a group within American culture. Using these criteria, all participants were positively oriented toward the older population and were accepting of the concept of creating a tradition of honoring the older population in American culture. Results of the study would have been different if the group had included participants who did not believe in the concept of honoring the older population.

Although an effort was made to include both males and females, as well as a diverse group of race and ethnicity, the percentage of the diverse groups was not proportionate to the general population. This also limits any feasible generalization to a larger group. Some terms used in the interview questions were not defined and may have been interpreted differently by participants. There was no definition for the word old or
the word tradition. Since "old" means different things to different people, it is possible that responses were directed toward a specific age faction in some instances while a more general use of the word may have been used by others. The word tradition was a problem for some participants who were viewing the word as a specific ritual instead of a perspective. This was not clarified in the beginning of the interview and may have influenced some of the responses given.

All of the participants in the study had positive relationships with older adults and positive experiences with the older population. There was a general consensus that the American culture needs to view aging in a positive manner. This is not the current general perspective in American society and, therefore, sets this group apart and again limits generalization. The underlying purpose of this study was to prepare a platform for discussion concerning creating a tradition for honoring the older population in American culture. Due to the participants involved in the study the results of the research present only the positive and supportive side of this issue. Any opposing or negative perspective regarding establishing such a tradition is not included in this report.
Chapter Six - Conclusions and Implications for Social Work Practice

Conclusions

Participants provided instances of older adults being treated negatively in American culture. This would suggest that the attitude of ageism exists and needs to be addressed. The older population is going to continue to grow in the coming years and the resources of the older population are becoming more vital in the functioning of American society. The tradition of honoring the older population could be a solution to the needs of the older population being recognized, and their talents and experience utilized. This tradition could also provide an opening for society to become aware of this growing age group and what they have to offer. With the tradition of honoring the older population, everyone wins. Society is enriched by an essentially untouched resource for potential and the older population is opened to the yet unexplored possibilities of the richness of long life experience.

The older adults can be guides and mentors for the young regarding the responsibilities of societal engagement. The young people in America could benefit from the wisdom and life experience, as well as the fund of knowledge, that the older population has to give. As the research indicated, the older population may need some guidance in how to deliver that knowledge and wisdom to today’s youth. In addition, the results indicated that the older population could be a means of preventing social problems among the youth. The older adults could be role models and sounding boards, as well as motivators and guides to young people.

In considering the tradition of honoring the older population, there is a need to recognize both sides of the issue. Society would need to change attitudes and behaviors,
but the older population would need to be prepared to accept and respond to these new
attitudes and behaviors. There is a need to provide the means to help both parties rise to
the occasion if the revolution to provide a tradition of honoring older adults is to be a
win-win situation for all involved.

*Implications for Social Work Practice*

The Council of Social Work Education’s (CSWE) Strengthening Aging and
Gerontology Education for Social Work (SAGE-SW) projected that by 2010 the
estimated need for social workers working specifically with older adults will reach
60,000-70,000 social workers (as cited in Kolomer et al., 2006). Kolomer et al. stated
that such events as advances in medical technology, the increase in immigrants, and the
aging baby boomers will account for a larger and more diverse older population. The
U.S. Department of Labor supported this projection by indicating, “The Bureau of Labor
Statistics has noted that the need of social workers is predicted to increase faster than the
average for all occupations through 2014 due to the rapidly growing elder population” (as
cited in Olson, 2007, p. 981).

Olson (2007) stated that “Social work has the opportunity to become an
invaluable resource to the aging population” (p. 991). As Olson pointed out, in order for
social workers to be effective in working with the aging population, ageism within the
social work profession needs to be understood more thoroughly. Ageism among social
workers needs to be addressed in ways to encourage and promote positive attitudes and
willingness to work with the older population.

With the continuing increase in the older population, social workers will be
interacting with older people in every area of practice. This means that social workers
will be instrumental in the care of the older population. The attitude of social workers
toward aging and the older population could have a direct impact on how older adults
perceive themselves and their place in society. If social workers recognize the potential
of the older population for being a viable part of the community, they can reinforce the
worth and value of older adults by the attitude and manner of the care they provide.

The results of this research suggested a social revolution as one possibility for
creating the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture. The concept
of a social revolution is the basis for the social work profession. Social work practice has
the opportunity to accept the challenge of engaging in this social revolution by having the
attitude of promoting and supporting the older population in whatever capacity a social
worker interacts with older adults. This challenge embodies two basic perspectives of the
profession: the Strengths Perspective and the Ecological Perspective.

Fundamental to the social revolution of creating the tradition of honoring the
older population in American culture is the ability of the social worker to view all older
adults from the Strengths Perspective. As Saleeby (2006) explained, the Strengths
Perspective includes approaching all situations with the attitude of finding strength from
within, recognizing resources at every juncture, developing collaborative relationships,
and caring about those involved in the process. Older adults in American culture need to
have their sense of self-determination restored and to be empowered in light of their
personal assets and potential. Social workers can provide the incentive necessary to
promote these qualities through the attitude of the Strengths Perspective. Any and all
encounters with an older adult could be a contribution to the social revolution of
establishing the tradition of honoring the older population if performed with the
motivation to increase self-determination and recognize the gift of that individual to society.

The Ecological Perspective examines the person in the environment and considers all relationships from the standpoint of reciprocity (Gitterman, 1996). It is this concept of reciprocity that is important in creating the tradition of honoring the older population. It is necessary to realize that society must provide opportunities for older adults to actively participate and be recognized for what they have to offer. It is just as important to help the older adults realize they have something to offer and encourage them to accept opportunities to give back to society, if they so desire. The social worker has an understanding of this give and take because of the training provided regarding the Ecological Perspective. The social worker can see both sides of the issue, society and older adults, and can help both sides provide what is needed for everyone to benefit from their transactions.

From the Advanced Generalist Perspective it would seem that positive, empowering interaction with the older population will in itself promote many levels of communication and impact. Social workers are key players in initiating and sustaining this communication and impact. By consciously engaging in the social revolution to create the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture, there will be a change in the older population, a change in society, and a resulting change in the core values of the American culture.
References


Appendix A

Human Research Review Committee Approval Letter

Consent Form
January 31, 2008

Proposal No.: 08-123-H  
Approval Date: January 30, 2008  
Title: The Tradition of Honoring the Older Population in American Culture

Dear Ms. Weisbeck,

Your proposed research project named above has been reviewed. It has been APPROVED as EXEMPT from the regulations by section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) of the Federal Register 46(16):8336, January 26, 1981. Please include your proposal number in all future correspondence. The first principal investigator will be sent all correspondence from the University unless otherwise requested.

Revisions: The HRRC must review and approve any change in protocol procedures involving human subjects, prior to the initiation of the change. To revise an approved protocol, including a protocol that was initially exempt from the federal regulations, send a written request along with both the original and revised protocols including the subject consent form, to the Chair of HRRC. When requesting approval of revisions both the project’s HRRC number and title must be referenced.

Problems/Changes: The HRRC must be informed promptly if either of the following arises during the course of your project. 1) Problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving the subjects. 2) Changes in the research environment or new information that indicates greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved. 3) Changes in personnel listed on the initial protocol, e.g. principal investigator, co-investigator(s) or secondary personnel.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at (616) 331-3417, or via e-mail at reitemep@gvsu.edu. You can also contact the Graduate Assistant in the Research and Development Office at (616) 331-3197.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Reitemeier, Ph.D.  
Human Research Review Committee Chair  
301C DeVos Center  
Grand Rapids, MI 49504  
Phone: (616) 331-2281
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO BE PART OF A RESEARCH PROJECT
Title: The Tradition of Honoring the Older Population in American Culture

Investigator: Catherine Weisbeck, Graduate Student in Master's of Social Work Program
Grand Valley State University

1. Research Purpose
You are being asked to be part of a research project. The purpose of this project is to explore how we as an American society view the older population and to identify what steps can be taken to create the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture.

2. Description of the research project
For this project, we are recruiting men and women who are either members of the older population, have worked with or volunteered to serve the older population, or have been involved in studying and discussing how we as an American culture view the older population. If you are interested in participating in this research, you will be asked to complete an in-person audio tape recorded interview which will take about one hour to one and a half hours. Prior to the interview, you will receive by mail a brief demographic survey, to be collected at the time of the interview, and the interview questions.

3. Risks and discomforts of the research
There are no known risks to you by participating in this research. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time or decline from answering any of the questions.

4. Expected benefits to subjects or to others
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research project. An indirect benefit to you is an opportunity to voice your ideas and suggestions for honoring our older population. Possible future benefits to others may include the awakening of an awareness of what we can do as a society to recognize and honor the older population.

5. Costs to subject resulting from participation in the study
There are no costs to you for participating in this research project, other than the time you spend filling out the demographic survey and doing the interview.

6. Confidentiality of information collected
You will not be identified in any reports on this research project. The records will be kept confidential to the extent provided by federal, state, and local law. The audio tapes will not have your name recorded, only a participant number. The tapes will be transcribed using only the participant number. The information on the demographic survey will be identified only by the participant number. The data will be reported as group data only, with no names attached. Quotations used from the tapes in reports, publications, or presentations will not be identified by name or any identifying
information. The master list of names and codes will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s possession. All hard copies and audio tapes of data will be kept locked in a file cabinet and, along with the electronic files, will be destroyed within 3-5 years after the completion of the study.

7. Availability of further information
   To find out more about any aspect of this research, including your rights as a participant, you may contact me at home (616-364-3167) or at my office (616-331-5669). If you wish to obtain information about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee at (616) 331-2281.

8. Voluntary nature of participation
   Your participation in this project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or decline from answering any of the questions, by notifying the researcher. There is no penalty of any kind if you decide to withdraw.

9. Documentation of the consent
   One copy of this document will be kept together with the research records on this project. Another copy will be given to you to keep.

10. Consent of the participant

   I have read [or been informed] of the information given above. I understand the meaning of this information. The researcher has offered to answer any questions I may have concerning the study. I hereby consent to participate in the study.

   ________________________________
   Printed Name

   ________________________________
   Consenting Signature

   ________________________________
   Date
Appendix B

Table: Demographic Data
### Demographic Data

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<th>Characteristics</th>
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<td>50 – 59</td>
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<tr>
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<td>73</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Life Long Learning</td>
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Appendix C

Research Interview

Demographic Survey

Letter to Participant
The Tradition of Honoring the Older Population in American Culture
Participant Interview

In America we tend to promote a youth-oriented society. Aging is considered something to avoid and looking young is highly valued. American society tends to disregard the older population as having served its purpose and is no longer of any value. It appears that society prefers that older people remain out of sight in order to reinforce a preference for youthfulness.

The purpose of this research is to explore the value of the older population to American society and to consider what it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in American society.

1. How do you feel the older population in general is treated in American society?

2. What evidence, if any, do you see of the older population being valued in American society?

3. What do you feel the older population has to give American society?
   - What activities would you see them engaging in regarding society?
   - Where in society would you see an older person being of most assistance?

4. Have you had an older person in your life who was a positive influence on you?
   - What relationship was this person to you?
   - How did you benefit from the presence of this person in your life?
   - What did you admire about this person?

5. What do you think it would take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture?

6. If we did have the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture, what do you think would be some of the benefits for society?
   - What would be some of the benefits for the older population?

7. What would need to be done for the older population in order to support them in the role of being honored in our American culture?

8. At what age do you feel someone becomes a member of the older population?
   - Please explain.

9. What do you think would be some steps we could take now to begin to establish the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture?

10. What other thoughts would you like to share regarding the older population and what can be done to support their contribution to society?
Participant Number __________________

The Tradition of Honoring the Older Population in American Culture
Demographic Survey

1. Please indicate your age. _________

2. Are you currently working?
   _____No
   _____Yes
   What is your job title? ____________________________________________________________

   What are your job responsibilities?

3. What has been your work/volunteer experience with the older population?

4. What is your field of practice? ________________________________________________

5. Please indicate your race/ethnicity. ____________________________________________

6. Please indicate your gender.
   _____Male
   _____Female

Thank you!!!
Dear (Name),

Thank you for being willing to participate in the study for my Master’s Thesis. Following are two documents, a copy of the demographic survey and a copy of the interview questions for the study.

Please fill out the demographic survey before our meeting on (Day, Date), at (Time) at (Place). The interview questions are for your consideration before our meeting. When we meet I will conduct the study interview using the interview questions enclosed. The interview will be audio taped. I will collect the demographic survey at that time.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about the materials or the interview. I am looking forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,

Cathy Weisbeck
Grand Valley State University
Social Work Department
364-3167
cathweis@att.net