

Aging and Your Cultural Environment

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Culture is found in collective ethos, philosophy, and values, shared principles, beliefs, and ethics. Through shared arts, music, and literature. Culture exudes a communal way-of-being, ways of living, mutual understanding and idealization. Culture has a shared particular, distinctive collective atmosphere, morality, and spiritual character.

Culture is a prime external factor, internalized over time as a result of your social environment from childhood through the years and into today. Cultural upbringing permeates your way-of-being, influencing how you perceive, understand, and behave in your elder years. Although we live in a global, multicultural society, most people tend to gravitate toward others who are most similar to themselves. We are most comfortable around people who look like us, think like us, and are near or equal to our economic, academic, and social status.

Strong friendships, robust interpersonal networks, and positive emotional bonds, are integral aspects of aging, culture and psychological well-being. Examining aging, culture and physical environment, members of strong cohesive community groups may be more likely to stay with their valued groups and more inclined to actively participate within the context of their community. However, the nature of community is not static but dynamic in that it gradually changes over time.

Changes in household composition are often based on transitions occurring across relatively long intervals of the time continuum.^[7] People age and move on. People die and eventually someone else occupies their former space. An influx of new people, with their own cultural concepts and ways of forging new bonds, adding to or subtracting from or even establishing new ideas of community prototypes. Communities and local households are much more fluid in today's society as compared to past eras.

The underpinnings of community are often not only shared race/ethnicity, but also shared economic status, educational attainment, spiritual orientation, as well as similar opinions, morals, and frame of mind. Solidarity is often established among people who have similar backgrounds. This similarity could be both material, i.e.,

similar work, housing and food and non-material such as similar beliefs, morality, religious foundations and feelings.^[5] Neighborhood characteristics (safety, cleanliness, available amenities and services, etc.), and community social environment greatly influence elderly well-being. Community-based policies for racially/ethnically diverse populations should give in-depth consideration to these factors when developing local aging and community-well-being programs.^[3]

Historically, the roots of discrimination have always been connected to education and socioeconomic disparities.^[1, 2, 6, 8] The process of community engagement often involves integrating practices of preventing discrimination, correcting imbalances, and managing relationships of difference. Using community sponsored themed exhibitions, multicultural festivals, documentaries and educational workshops, communities can work to inspire better citizenship by expanding residential perspectives on the diversity of their community. Inclusiveness welcomes all community members and celebrates diversity and differences in race, gender, social status, and abilities. Culturally diverse communities can further promote the understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity through explorations and presentations of religion, poetry, music, food and art.

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