

# Cultural aging

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This paper is designed to illustrate a cultural or ethnic group of my choosing and how they feel about the aging process. Also, to give detail of their background, their perspective and how it coordinates with the group, how they feel it effects aging on the older population, the elderly role in this cultural or ethnic group and and historical information in the group perspective if they immigrated in the United States. Within my findings I found out that African American woman (in particular) are concerned with aging but are not as concerned as Caucasian women. Being that African Americans have more melanin in their skin, wrinkles are not as common at the age of 65 as it would be of women who are the same age but of the Caucasian race.

For my paper on the perspectives, I chose to research African Americans and take a look in to how they perceive aging, how they feel it effects aging on the older population, their roles and if there are any historical changes in their perspective.

Most African Americans are the descendants of captive Africans held in the United States from 1619 to 1865. Blacks from the Caribbean whose ancestors immigrated, or who immigrated to the United States, also traditionally have been considered African American, as they share a common history of predominantly central Africans roots or west African, the middle passage and slavery.

In the past, it was these people who were referred to and self-identified collectively as the American Negro, who now generally consider themselves African Americans. The history of African Americans are highlighted and

celebrated annually in the United States during February, which is respectfully known as Black History month, and their history is the sole focus that time. Others who some times are Americans who descended from slaves, are referred to as African Americans, and who may self identify as such in United States government censuses, include relatively recent black immigrants from Africa, South America and elsewhere who self-identify as of African descent.

A big percentage of African Americans descended from slaves, most of which were sold by African states or kidnapped by African, Arab, European or American slave traders. The existing market for slaves in Africa was exploited and expanded by European powers in search of free free labor for New World plantations.

Are African Americans less concerned with the consequences of aging? Let's take the cosmetic world for example to emphasize my points to come. The cosmetic world is filled with all sorts of products designed to keep women (and occasionally men) look (and feeling) young. The products are primarily geared towards skin care and more specified for wrinkles. Let's take a look at cosmetic commercials and ads, you mist find something very interesting: there are few black women.

Of course, there are women of different ethnic groups, which by way of sending a message that all women, no matter ethnicity are concerned with aging. For the most part, it seems that Caucasian women (more so than black women) are concerned about the aging process. To aid in my point, I'll use the statistics from the Society of Plastic Surgeons that proves that

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African Americans are still one of the smaller groups requesting plastic surgery. Whites account for 69% while blacks have only 8%.

There is a very popular phrase within the African American community affirming that "black don't crack". This phrase is an exact implication that African Americans typically look younger in age versus other ethnic groups, mainly the white ethnic group. A person's physical health, one's lifestyle and health definitely play a role in this. It is usually quite common for people to mistake a black woman who may be 65 and be mistaken for 55 and for women in their 40's to be mistaken as being in their 30's (Yeo, 2001). The most common and scientifically proven reason for this is because African Americans typically have more melanin than a person has in their skin, the more complex it is for the skin's harmful rays to penetrate, creating wrinkles, spots, lines and other anomalies.

For some reason, it has not been until recently that cosmetic companies begun targeting African-American women for anti-aging products. In a 2006 article in Essence magazine, it purports that the cosmetic industry in general has seen a marked increase in toiletries and cosmetic advertising in general, marketers choosing non-black publications to reach an additional demographic.

"The myth is that women of color don't care about aging," the president of Essence, Michelle Ebanks has stated. "We don't wrinkle as early, but we care about it". That confirms it! That statement is a pure indication that black women are just as concerned about their aging physical appearance as other ethnic groups. However, Ebanks also shed great insight on another important

note; women of color are more likely to share information about beauty products by word of mouth, rather than through heavy media commentary. This in and of itself may give the impression that black women are less concerned with aging.

The general theory that black women give birth at a younger age than other ethnic groups also might have a little something to do with the perception that they care less about aging (Yeo, 2001). While this may sound stilted and just outrageous, do consider the fact that if a woman gives birth to her first child by the age of 20, by the time that child is able to enter college, the mother is still at her youthful age, barely reaching 40. If this birth cycle (or similar variations of it) continues, then the mother will be able to call herself "Grandma" before she even reaches the age of 50.

Although, black women who become grandmothers rather early very often feel less inclined to be concerned with aging; because they have already completed a life cycle that others take many years to establish. It could be said that as stigma of young motherhood becomes more irrelevant, so do the women's concerns about growing old.

The elderly are treated with high regard and respect in the African American community. Those women who enter this "elder" phase of life early (25 to 38 years old) feel the pressure of role conflict and tension in the social support they receive (Dorothy, 2004). They perceive grand parenthood as a "tenuous" role. Those who enter grand parenthood "on time" (42 to 57 years old) have less conflict but can also feel the pressure of integrating family and occupational roles (Ada, 1998). Women in this age usually occupy a

traditional family role, that "lofty" and respected position of a grandmother. She is also the nurturer and disciplinarian of children, the family historian, the hub of the family network in which decisions are made, and the convener of family events.