

Sociological analysis of the elderly: a life history approach



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Introduction:

People grow old every second the clock ticks. Everything in life is fleeting and impermanent because nothing is static. A great example is aging. It is a lifelong process that is fast and inevitable. As people grow old, life experiences contribute to coping mechanism and decision making while an individual progress through life. Growing old brings with its distinctive experiences as well as significant social development. An elderly man that has a strong social foundation displays a fulfilled and meaningful life. As described by Funk (2016), "socialization is a complex and lifelong process through which individuals learn the social norms, habits, lifestyles, values, ways of thinking, and other aspects of their culture, and internalize these as important parts of their own personal identities" (p. 202). Certainly, growing old is a complex and gradual process that is being affected by different factors such as family relationship, cultural background and individual role. By critically analyzing these sociological aspects of aging, we will be able to understand the impact these may bring to the senior population in our society.

Methodology:

"Qualitative research methodologies can more fully (and validly) investigate the complexity of human phenomena, including issues such as ethnicity, culture, gender, and sexuality" (Gough & Lyons, 2016, p. 238). The qualitative methodology is the method that "seeks to understand the social experience of individuals from the subjects' perspective" (Novak, Campbell, & Northcott, 2014, p. 38) has been utilized in collecting information from the

research subject. The interview was conducted using the three steps of Atkinson (1998) life history approach which includes: planning or pre-interview, doing the interview and transcribing or interpreting (p. 26). The purpose was explained before the interview have started and consent was signed, questions have been asked by the subject and answered to the best knowledge of the interviewer. The pub at the subjects' residential facility have been agreed upon both parties as to where the interview setting will be. The semi-structured research is the interview technique that have been used, with the formulation of 10-15 set of questions that served as a guide. Open ended questions offer opportunity for the subject to explore answers which provides much more detail of the subject's life story. The interview took about 90 minutes and was recorded with the subject's consent at the beginning and transcribed afterwards. The subject was provided with the written copy of the transcribed interview for revisions and/or additions.

Profile:

The subject is a resident at a retirement home facility in which I am working part time. He and his wife are currently occupying an independent living suite. I first met the respondent when the facility opened in July this year. I am one of the pioneering workers of the facility and the subject together with his wife are one of the pioneering residents. Although, our relationship evolves mostly on a worker and a client basis, he is friendly and approachable by nature.

He was born in a small community called Norbury in Saskatchewan on April 1930. His father came to Canada in 1921 and had also worked for other

farmers in Saskatoon area. His parents were good friends back in England and they planned to meet in Canada someday and get married. So, they met in Prince Albert in July 1925 and were married immediately. He is the fourth of six siblings. He had three brothers and two sisters. His family were farmers in Saskatchewan. He had been married for 65 years and blessed with five kids, 2 girls and three boys with 6 grandchildren (4 grandsons, 2 granddaughter).

Life History:

When my subject was seventeen, he got his first paying job away from home at a logging camp. He enjoyed working at a camp. After he got married, he moved with his wife in Kinuso, Alberta. They started their life their and have kids. His kids have been so far successful with their lives, he always made sure that he communicates with his children and their families as well as his siblings and their families. He and his wife had a great married life and they keep close contact with all their daughters, sons, grandchildren and their families. " I guess you could say that we have a close family tight" (Anonymous, personal communication, October 25, 2018).

The subject hails from Norbury district in Saskatchewan to a family of 8. Both his parents are from England. Growing up in a farm, he used to feed and took care of the animals (horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, geese, turkeys and chickens). " I always remember that animals were very important part of our lives" (Anonymous, personal communication, October 25, 2018). His parents were good providers, all the food that they need were all grown in the farm. When he was young, he remembers seeing his mother crying after getting

letters from relatives in England and that upsets him and his siblings. Him and his brothers were very close at each other, they respect each other.

At the age of 23, he got married to his wife of 65 years now. On 1954, they had their first daughter, the next year (1955) they had their son, two years after (1957) they had another daughter, three years after (1960) they had another son, and finally the youngest (son) was born four years after the fourth. He used to work at a grain company for a long period but unfortunately, the company had to close down, that opted him to retire earlier than he wanted too. All his sons also used to work with him at the grain company, they used to assemble grain elevators. When he retired, they moved to Fort St. John in BC. He always looks forward for summertime because his two grandsons always spend their summer break at his place.

Social Context:

Various sociological concepts influenced the subject's life history such as family, culture and his role. He is a Canadian-born senior with Euro-Canadian ethnocultural group. Growing up at a farm with family, he has been influenced by his parent's dominant or majority group which is European culture. I suppose the subject's life story was impacted by an individualistic culture. Chappell and Kusch (2007) addressed that, "Euro-Canadian seniors tend to prefer living independently while maintaining intimacy-at-a-distance" (as cited in Novak et al, 2014, p. 80). More evidently, him and his wife we're living on a suite at a retirement facility independently but at the same time, they always made sure to check on their children and their families. He said,

“ we keep in close contact with all our daughters, sons and their families”
(Anonymous, personal communication, October 25, 2018).

For him, the support system from his parents and family are his biggest influences in life. His father and mother brought him up pretty well and discipline him with roles that shaped him the way he is now. A research conducted by Johnson and Hitlin (2017) mentioned that “ parents are theorized to shape their children’s orientations and achievements by the material and emotional resources available for parenting as well as their goals for their children” (p. 2217). The close family tight relationship that his parents instill on him while growing up with his siblings, affects the way he assumes his role as a husband, a father and a role model for his grandchildren. “ My parents were good providers and none of us kids remember being short of good food” (Anonymous, personal communication, October 25, 2018). From the social role standpoint, my subject’s assumption of his role in the family was influenced by his father’s treatment and discipline towards them. His hard work and dedication had paid off by realizing that he had a great married life and all his children and grandchildren are enjoying a good life now.

Theoretical Analysis

“ Social structures do not determine behavior but, rather, form a context in which individuals experience the aging process” (Wister & McPherson, 2014, p. 166). Looking at the subject’s story, it allows us to know life from his viewpoint. Old age may have brought loneliness onto some but for this subject, family is the key. His life develops from micro-level of experiences

which evolved mostly with his family (parents and siblings) and he used that experience throughout his aging life. The symbolic interactionism perspective by Funk (2016) explained that “ it examines how individuals respond to each other on the basis of how they believe they are perceived by others and, in turn, how they want to convey themselves to others” (p. 7). This perspective may interpret the subjects’ claims that “ I was always very fond of my brothers and sisters, and we all had respect for each other” (Anonymous, personal communication, October 25, 2018).

Family was given meaning on the respondent’s story, perhaps the life story was circling around his family. Everyone in the family played an important role. His father and mother made sure that there is always food on the table. Moreover, Stryker & Vryan explained that, “ when symbolized, things, ideas, and relationships between things and ideas enter people’s experience as objects whose meanings, developing from social interaction, become their social reality” (2003, p. 6).

Considering the life course perspective approach, the changes of social roles and structures can be recognized throughout the respondent’s life. From first paying job, marriage, fatherhood, to an early retirement as well as being a grandfather are the transitions and trajectories that the respondent has experienced. The diversity of all these roles affects how the respondent accept the changes and assume continuity within the society. Aging as a dynamic process with which the respondent has experienced through social diversities and social change. As stated by Murphy, Arxer, & Belgrave (2010), “ what the life course orientation does, simply stated, is give a somewhat reasonable portrayal of the ageing process” (p. 6). Additionally, Russel <https://assignbuster.com/sociological-analysis-of-the-elderly-a-life-history-approach/>

(2007) determined that “ a person’s existence is an integrated and dynamic event” (as cited in Murphy et al., 2010, p. 6).

Conclusion

In analyzing my respondent’s life story and applying sociological perspective. Family relationships, cultural backgrounds and individual’s role are the social context that shape my respondent’s life. Aging can be a difficult transition due to the high demands of the society we are living in. Nevertheless, by applying sociological theories, we have come to understand the subject’s comprehension and attitude towards social events that occurred in his life. Moreover, it concludes that society is changing and so is aging, it is an imminent process that cannot be avoided. His acceptance of aging is the manifestation on how he had lived a productive life.

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