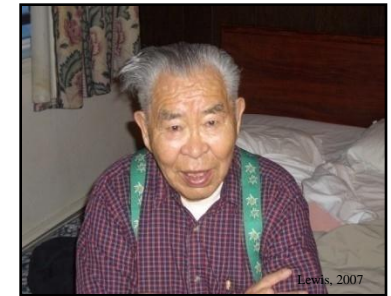


Successful aging through the eyes of Alaska Natives.

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Introduction:

- A minority (American Indian/Alaska Native) definition of successful aging does not currently exist in the literature.
- This study will establish an Alaska Native definition of successful aging.
- This research will determine whether or not villages are able to meet their needs and enable elders to live their remaining years in their community as they wish.

Background:

- Alaska Native are critical to the social and cultural values of villages.
- There is very little research on ethnic minority elders and how they subjectively define a successful older age.
- Lack of a minority definition lumps them together with a generic definition by Rowe & Kahn* and most likely portrays them as aging less successful than their non-minority counterparts.

Research question:

How do Alaska Natives subjectively define successful aging?

Methods:

- Focuses on identifying how Alaska Native elders define and interpret their world (e.g., emic perspective).
- Does not rely on experimentation to gather data, but rather careful observation and description of phenomena through interviews and questionnaires.
- Uses an inductive research strategy in which ideas, concepts, and themes emerge from the data (e.g. Grounded theory).
- Interviewed a purposive sample of eight (8) elders in order to determine the feasibility and culturally appropriateness of using the Cultural Consensus Model (Bernard, H.R., 1998).*
- Elders were volunteers from the Fairbanks area representing four (Aleut, Athabascan, Inupiaq, Yup'ik) cultural groups with a mean age of 75 and an age range of 62 to 84.

References

Bernard, H.R. (1998). *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

*Rowe, John W. & Robert L. Kahn (1987). Human aging: Usual and Successful. *Science*, 237, 143-149.

Results:

- How one views whether or not they are aging successfully is based on personal responsibility and cognitions.
- Most elders stated that reaching a certain age (e.g. 65) does not determine their status as an elder, but rather the wisdom and experiences they gain throughout life.
- This study illustrates the importance of allowing elders to define successful aging.
- The questions need to focus more specifically on the role the community plays in how they view aging as well as differentiate between aging in rural versus urban communities.
- This research will guide a larger study on successful aging among Alaska Natives in rural communities and its implications on future generations as our concepts of aging change and more people relocate to urban communities.