

As the human race, we have developed a barrage of stereotypical expectations, influences, and biased opinions based off of previous life views and critical inquiry. With time, I have come to develop a personal interest in the stereotypes surrounding aging and the belief that these stereotypes affect one's aging process. The main "understanding" and stereotype of the aging process in modern day America, when structured into a visual form, takes the shape of a tall mountain peak. This simple line pattern depicts our current take on life's quality and process. The line shows that at birth, one is born and from that point, one grows mentally, and through experience, gathers essential knowledge and physical excellence. This period of time includes childhood, puberty, adolescence, and adulthood. Because society has become so fixed on social influence, we have come to create the idea that after "adulthood", we melt slowly and uncontrollably into a "miserable" state of being called "old age". This stereotypical theory states that after our peak of adulthood, our life quality declines. It declines into wrinkles and painful immobilization and a state of mind-boggling confusion. Our view on this last and final stage of life has developed into a somewhat negatively feared interpretation of our final stage of existence. Other cultures have beliefs of the aging process where a mountain peak visual is nonexistent and being elderly is the finest stage of life, where the highest state of wisdom and self-understanding is achieved and cherished. Our American culture eliminates a large portion of important, potential living time by setting old age up for negative outlooks and expectations.

Although American culture has created many popular, age oriented, ceremonial traditions, I believe we must rid our current mental expectations of old age and create a new view of the quality of life in its last stages, therefore ridding such harsh and drastic boundaries for "stages" in life that are currently celebrated by age old tradition. I believe each stage of life has purpose, whether positive or negative. Change and transitional life experiences are a continuous action that will ultimately lead to deeper and more infinite levels of self-exploration, development and understanding. As a society, we may believe that in adulthood comes automatic self-comprehension, but in reality, we only come close to understanding of self towards the end of life when we have the power to reflect on the entirety of our personal experience and when little to no time is left to continue living. When we are on the fine and delicate line between death and vitality, we come to truth with personal self-realization. At our last phase, when we have gained wrinkled skin, faded memory and a defined accent from a lifetime of experience, we accept our time, we realize the end is near and we unconsciously belong to a new level of comprehension of life meaning.

In past Korean culture, the aging process has been considered a sacred concept, as opposed to modern American culture; the final stages of life were seen as the highest and most sacred time of life. In Korea, the elderly were praised and treated with the upmost respect. By tradition, Korean elders were expected to be cared for by their children. As a family value, it was expected for one to care for their aged family members and to allow and provide them with a luxurious place of honor and authority. In the past, Korea was an elder-centered society but in more recent times, the value system has switched to become a mostly youth-centered society, similar to that of recent American societal values.

Based off past government collected data, there seems to be a decline in the percentage of elderly residing in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. In 2007, 1.8 million people were living in assisted living, but the data from previous years was far more extensive, proving that the percentage of elders living in nursing or assisted housing has dropped in more current years.

The popular belief is that an increase in positive health for seniors and an incline in choices of care for the elderly have created a drop in the nationwide percentage of people in assisted living facilities. Another trendy factor in the topic is the fact that the majority of folks in assisted living are financially stable. The average cost for a yearly residence at a home is between \$67,000.00 and \$100,000.00. This data is clear evidence that wealthy white Americans are more likely to receive assisted living care in comparison to any other economic or racial group.

In all cultures and in all cycles and forms of society, we fall into what is considered the “norm” and the popular action without consciously realizing its affects. The fashion style of modern day America has lead to the idea of “self preservation” and the idea of forever youthful living. This is what we call normal. The idea of our so called “youthful living” began in the late 1920’s when the concept and influence of female modeling began to influence society’s perception of physical expectation. From this time, nearly 100 years ago, women have fallen into the trance and influence of fashion modeling. Models across the globe have come to possess what is known to most people as the ideal people of beauty. By way of abundant media coverage and convincing advertising including magazine articles, TV commercials and films, we have become convinced that the messages hidden in the media are true. In this instance, we have created an image in the minds of greatly sized populations of the “ideal human”. By nature, we subconsciously aim to capture and pursue this “divine” state of being. It is a clear reality that we have slowly lead women of all ages to assume that the natural physical effects of aging must be suppressed and prevented. This nearly instinctive belief leads women across the nation to chemically transform their hair color to meet the shades of their youth and surgically stretch their skin to fit tightly again to its frame. As a culture, we are forcing ourselves to remain stationed in one category of age: our youth. This practice is the most obvious example of our epidemic ritual of age altering practices. This situation leads me to ask, “What is it that we are so heavily trying to avoid?”

There was an assumption made in the past that has lead us to attempt to avoid aging. In all reality, we have only just discovered ways in which to momentarily disguise the physical effects of age but we have yet to prevent the serious and realistic effects of time and its process and toll on the human body. We are physically taking part in the attempt to avoid an essential stage in life. Whether or not this belief was created through religious influence, the media, a series of observed patterns occurring in old age, or the combination of both, our present interpretation of old age seems to be nearly unalterable when considering its strong popularity and hypnotizing control over the lives of so many people.

At this time in America, it is difficult to view the transition into old age as divine or sacred. Not only are the appearances of aging frowned upon, but as a culture, we have willingly chosen to alter and abandon previous acts of care for our elders. In addition, we continuously experience brainwashing, stereotypical, media driven views of age related circumstances including drug commercials, retirement ads and magazines directed specifically to the elderly. Weather we realize it or not, we are living in a culture where the elderly are targeted as their own kind of people, separated from the rest of society.

When I reflect on my personal experiences concerning age related stereotypes, I give credit to the aging processes of my grandparents. Within the last four years, my perception of the aging transition seems to have developed into a depth filled eye-opening process. In the last 1,460 days, I have witnessed deaths and loss due to life’s cycle, but I have also witnessed a series

of beautifully remarkable and influential happenings in the lives of my family. When my grandmother broke her hip, she and my grandfather suddenly found themselves restricted of their independence and bound by the care of their children. After years of living comfortably in their own home which they owned, took care of, and loved, this unconscious level of freedom was rid from their lives within a matter of weeks. My grandmother's accident was a harsh reality check. Not only was she seriously injured, but the trauma from the damage also led to a decline in my grandfather's mental state, leaving him fuzzy and confused. A year and a half later, my grandfather passed away after a slow but clear decline in his mental capability. In his last rush of life, he remained content, continuously staying positive, smiling at the views captured out the car windows on his outings into town and spreading love. My grandfather was in the luxurious care of his five children, moving back and forth between Chimayo and Ojo Caliente, New Mexico for the last part of his life. In this time, he lived in these rural parts of the state, eating homemade food and being blessed by the love of family. Thomas Wimett passed away in a small, calmly lit room filled with his family and holding the hand of his only son. He was born on a small ranch in Montana and passed on in a small farm in Ojo Caliente, New Mexico. This occasion has led me to realize that death is unavoidable but should be viewed as a rebirth, a time of ultimate realization, a time when freedom is more prevalent than ever before and where beauty is alive with more enthusiasm than in past times.

“Our entrance into this life is a mystery. Our exit an even greater one...We know not whither from nor whither bound. We must accept them both, comprehending neither the one nor the other. There are no answers to the ultimate questions: ‘Who am I? Why am I here? And how? What is my place in the Cosmos?’ Knowledge cannot help us... Whether we know it or not, we live by faith. Each day is a lifetime... Each day is a miracle.” –Nell Dorr (Of Night and Day)

Life is sacred. All series and orders of events make an impact on the outcome of our vitality and we rely on life's beauties to gain a sense of importance and an assuring sense of pleasure. In life, we are fortunate to change and be affected by time and place. We will be damaged and broken-hearted but we will also continue to find sources of essence and brilliance. In our lifetime, we will travel through a series of emotional waves; we will feel the weight of responsibility and the pleasures of love. Over time, our bodies will degrade in a slow, uncontrollable way, its effects only bringing us closer to our final moments, the process extraordinary and remarkably complex.

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