



Transitioning to Honor the Older Population in America

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Culture

- Definition of Culture
 - Worldview
 - Human Interaction
 - Passed down through generations
- Attitude toward aging – social construct

Colonial Times

- Old Age a Blessing
- Older Adults
 - Wealth
 - Power
- Everyone wanted to appear older.





Industrial Revolution

- Change from farming to manufacturing
- Focus on youth
- Wealth and power change hands
- Older Adults
 - Social burden
 - Obstacles to progress
 - Isolated, poor
 - Disregarded for over 100 years

“Hypercognitive Culture”



- Qualities for human fulfillment
 - Self Control
 - Independence
 - Economic productivity
 - Cognitive enhancement

Ageism

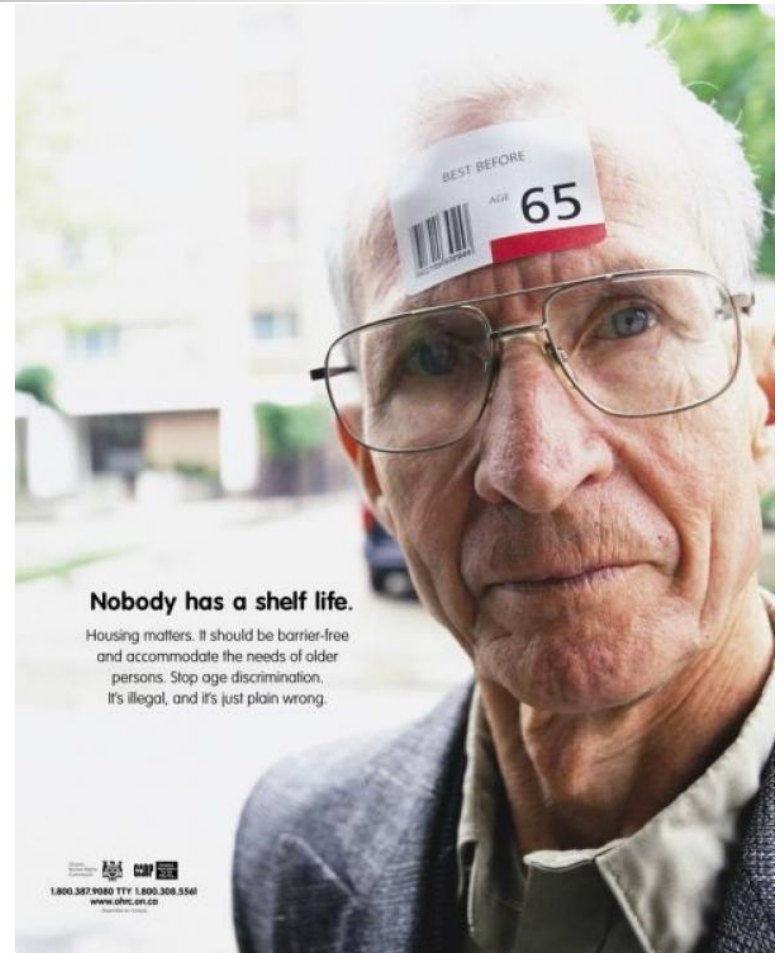
- Prejudice and discrimination based on age
- Attitudes
 - Hypercognitive Culture
 - Fear of death
 - Emphasis on youth
 - Emphasis on productivity



Ageism

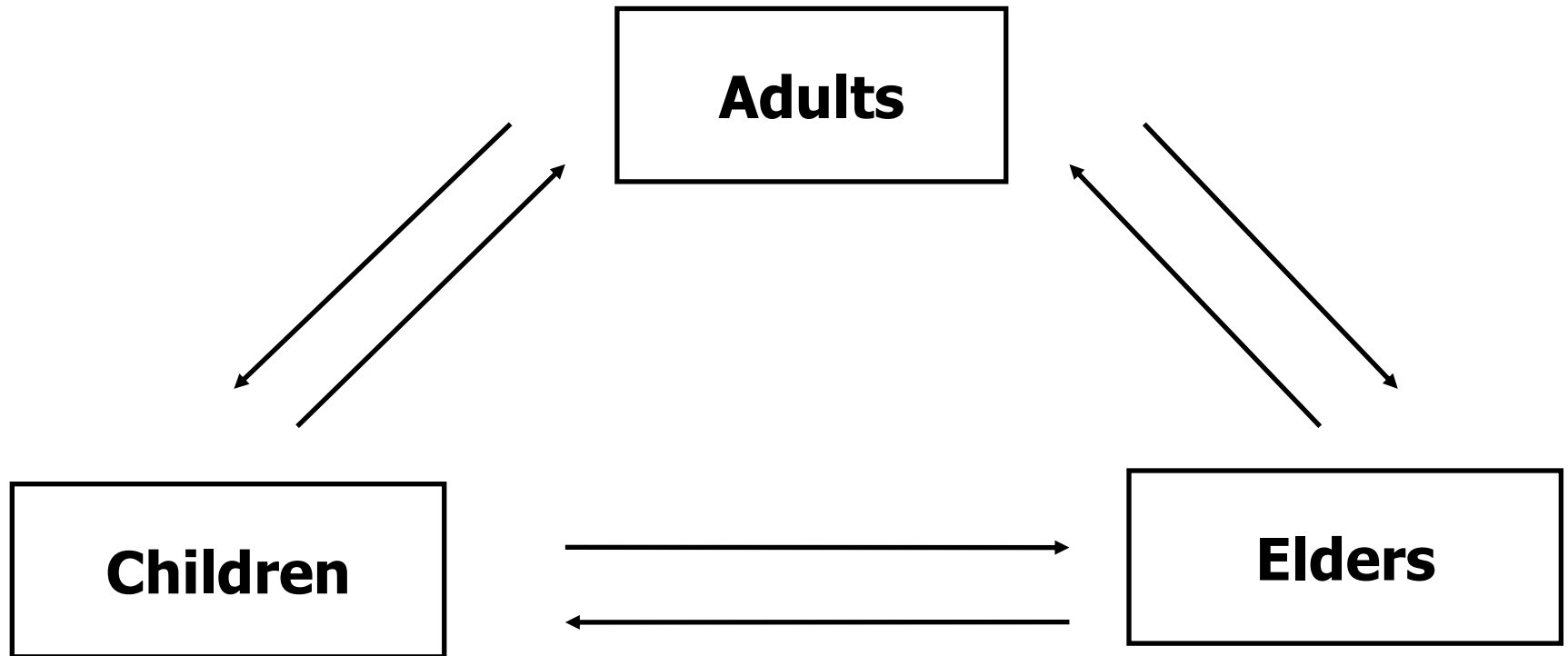
■ Results

- Reduction of ability to contribute
- Older adults devalue themselves
- Perpetuating fear of aging
- Tendency to isolate older adults
- Unacceptable to embrace aging as a natural process

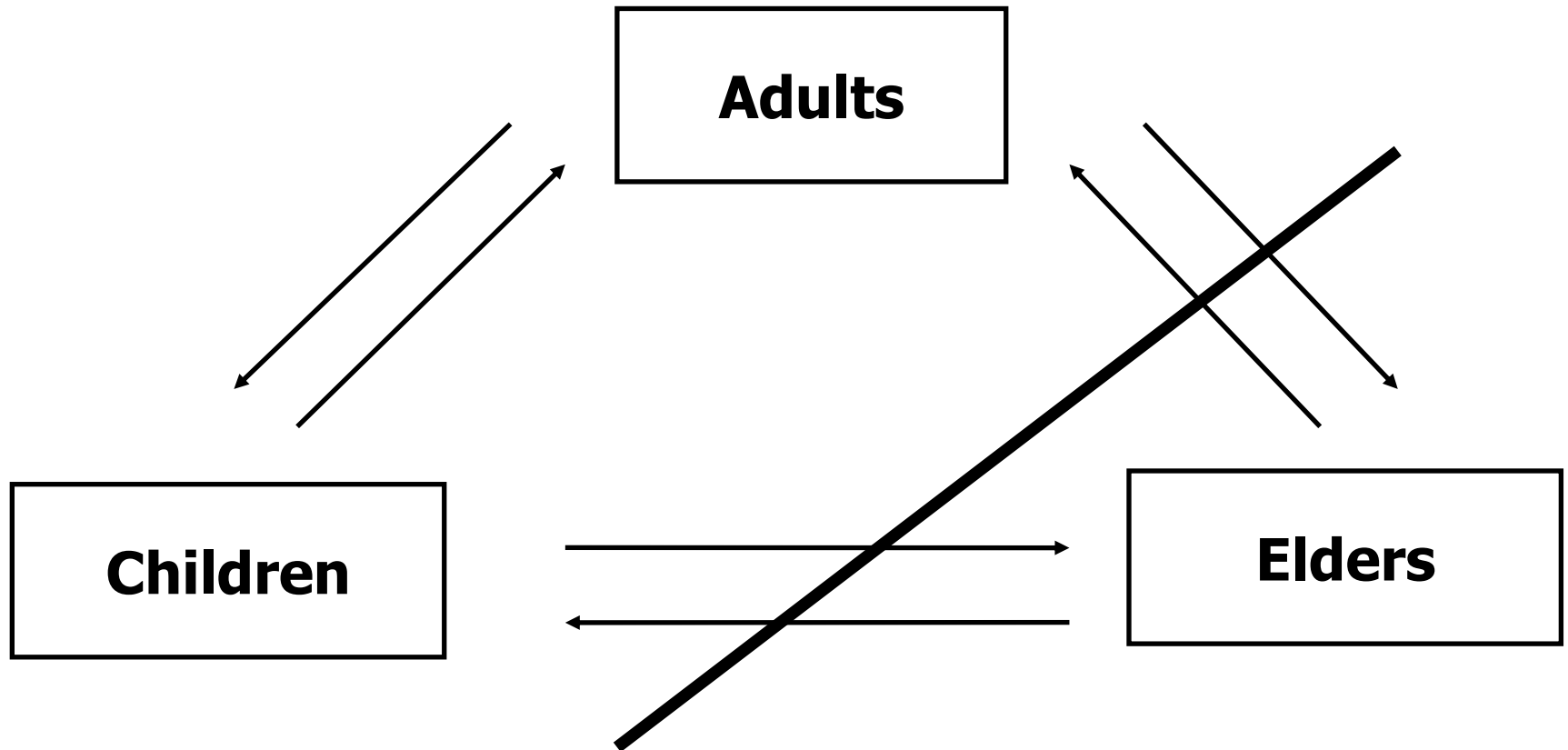




Functional Culture



Contemporary View of American Culture



Contemporary View



191137 [RF] © www.visualphotos.com

- Results of Elders Isolated
 - Adults in charge
 - Ever faster pace – speed
 - Efficiency
 - Productivity
 - Financial gain

Contemporary View

- Results of Elders Isolated
 - Children under Adults' care
 - Pressed ever earlier into education
 - Play obsolete
 - Imagination discouraged
 - Achievement/Success highly valued



Functional Contemporary View

- Elders' Role
 - Slow down the adults
 - Temper speed and activity
 - Enforce values and priorities
 - Save the children
 - Allow the children to play
 - Encourage imagination
 - Enable children to find their own way
 - Share stories and wisdom





Transitioning to Elders' Role

- Research Project
 - What would it take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture?
 - Sample of 15 participants
 - Face to face interview



Sample Characteristics

- Age Range: 40 – 87
- Gender: 11 Women, 4 Men
- Ethnicity: 11 White, 2 African American, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Latino
- Employment: 12 Employed, 3 Not



Research Questions

- 1. How do you feel the older population in general is treated in American society?
 - 82 Responses
 - Negative Treatment – 78%
 - Positive Treatment – 22%



Research Questions

- 2. What evidence, if any, do you see of the older population being valued in American society?
 - 68 Responses
 - Intergenerational Interaction – 19%
 - Within the Family – 16%



Research Questions

- 3. If we did have the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture, what do you think would be some of the benefits for society?
 - 63 Responses
 - Older Population Enriching Society – 27%
 - A More Caring Society – 19%



Research Questions

- 4. What would it take to create the tradition of honoring the older population in our American culture?
 - 96 Responses
 - Change in Society – 14%
 - Change in Older Adults – 13%



Research Questions

- 5. What do you think would be some steps we could take now to begin to establish the tradition of honoring the older population in American culture?
 - 79 Responses
 - Provide Opportunities for Older Adults to Have a Voice in Society – 23%
 - Help Older People Accept Their Dignity and Worth – 19%



Common Themes

- Potential of the Older Population
- Giving Recognition to Older Adults
- Intergenerational Programs/Interaction Between the Old and Young



Implications to Social Levels

- Change on All Levels of Society
- Social Revolution
- Change in the Older Population



Conclusions

- Ageism Exists in American Culture
- Older Population is a Resource
- Honoring the Older Population Favors Society and Older Adults
- Intergenerational Programs Benefit Old and Young
- Change Needed for Society and Older Adults

What is needed?



- Change in society
- Change in the older population
- Change in attitude



Change in Society

- Programs offered
 - Encore
 - Civic Engagement
 - Aging Friendly Communities
- New Programs to consider
 - Ways to contribute to community needs
 - Having a voice in community decisions
 - Being consulted on priority issues



Change in the Older Population

- Definition of an Elder
- Empowering older adults
- Programs offered
 - From Age-ing to Sage-ing
 - ZEST for Life
 - Leadership
- New Programs needed
 - Pioneers of Aging



Change in Attitude

- Consider Positive Aging
 - Belief in aging as a natural process
 - Acceptance that the later years include growth, generativity, and development
 - Looking forward to the later years and the benefits included
 - Knowledge
 - Experience
 - Wisdom/Insight/Perception
 - Creativity



Comments from Participants:

- “But I do think as a society we need to find ways in which people can feel useful their whole life, with whatever physical and cognitive abilities they have, and so, that’s the part of society I think we’ve got to start changing our ideas, changing the workplace, about when people retire.”



Comments from Participants:

- “Alright, I said if seniors could be presented as pioneers of aging, and openly expose and share their contentment as well as their challenges, not especially for the purpose of new and improved medical procedures, but with the idea that the general public, all of whom hate and deny old age, could be positively impacted about the realities of the last years. It would be a useful service...”



Words to Consider

- “Being an elder of the tribe is awesome, demanding, and exhilarating. Elders have a purpose for living that’s stronger than any physical disabilities that might slow us down. As the mind and spirit triumph over the body’s infirmities, we work passionately to achieve our goals of social justice, environmental safety, and cross-cultural understanding.” (Maggie Kuhn)