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The Contemporary Older Man: Summary and Discussion

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This edition of the Journal has included a series of articles on the contemporary man in his elder years and the challenges and opportunities he may face. For example, an article by Bullock brings attentions to the increasing number of grandfathers who are becoming responsible for their grandchildren in the absence of fathers. Her study of 26 men age 65 and above who are responsible for the care of at least one grandchild revealed perceptions of powerlessness as grandfathers made this family role transition. Bullock argues that such feelings of powerlessness can be stemmed by programs that provide opportunities for greater self-awareness and support. She also raises questions about the grandfathers' parenting style: Are they interactive care providers or simply passive caretakers? Another issue raised is how schools and agencies involved in kinship care can pay special attention to older men who take on the role of parenting.

In a postmodern critique of today's older man, Gross and Blundo explore the medicalization of the body through the promotion of Viagra. The taking of the drug is used as a metaphor of cultural expectations illustrating how men are required to age well. That is, how society expects them to maintain their youthful masculinity. The authors raise the question, can medication change a man's concept of himself? A reading of the article begs

the question of how male concepts of self are created. Is the aging body really a machine. The language of television ads surely would suggest so.

In another article designed to portray the modern older man, Blundo and Estes use an experiential process of listening to their anecdotes. Through this discourse, they learn what men think about their own aging processes. The anecdotes share and reveal basic human uncertainties about the latter stages of the life cycle. Men have long been considered to be less elaborative when asked about their emotions. These anecdotes demonstrate introspection and insight.

In a culturally specific article, Villereal & Cavazos address the shift in machismo identity that occurs among Mexican-American males as they age. The shift involves the idea that there is the cultural expectation that a young man will grow up to be a strong man, whereas girls will be submissive and obedient. However, towards the latter part of life, decision-making becomes a more equal shared process between husband and wife. Thus, the aging Mexican-American male struggles to redefine his role within the family. The question raised is apparent: What occurs when a basic construct used to organize a man's world is lost in old age?

Similarly, the culturally specific nature of Deborah Bowen's work with Lakota men suggests the uniqueness with which we must approach aging men and specifically the cultural lives of aging men. Her interviews revealed a great deal of the hardships and success within the lives of men living within the world of the Rosebud Reservation, home of Lakota people for many generations. The cultural construct *mitakuye oyas'in* points to the relevance of seeing aging men in all their uniqueness and the strengths these meanings bring to their lives.

In another article on the marginalization of older men, Kosberg suggests that the literature as well as our educational processes should pay greater attention to older males. He contends that much information about the older man is generalized and stereotypic. He argues that we should address male-specific factors in the aging process including health and relationship issues.

In an article about economic inequality, Davis makes the case

that a disproportionate percentage of African-American males do not live to collect their benefits under SSA. He examines the role of the federal government in keeping the program solvent. He raises two critical questions about the privatization of Social Security: (1) Does the low, moderate, or even most middle-income U. S. citizen have the educational preparation, and time, to manage the investment of their own retirement funds; and (2) Do they earn enough money to be able to pay an investment broker's commission that is taken on each investment transaction?

Making the case that older men tend to be underserved by social service providers, Kaye and Crittenden present "male-friendly" principles of clinical practice with older men. They discuss more familiar areas to address in counseling such as the loss of a spouse and retirement as well as topics not sufficiently considered including counseling gay men, men as caregivers, and men who are depressed. Most importantly, the authors remind us of the importance of treating depression among older men who account for 85% of adult suicides.

Taken together, the series of articles offer several educational opportunities for discussing older men within schools of social work human behavior content. For example, the authors suggest that there is an irony in the way we perceive societal power differentials. White men are said to be the predominant power source in the US. Yet, collectively the authors ask what happens to this power as men age. Why are older men supposedly ignored?

The articles also question whether there is a continuity in men's identity formation or whether these processes change as they age. The authors also debate whether the relational self, a self that highly values personal relationships rather than competitiveness is as important to men as it is to women? Does this apparent change in self accompany the aging process?

Another salient theme discussed in the articles is whether aging can be viewed as a natural process. This question is explored through the examination of body image and continued sexuality as a symbol for aging well. If role change naturally accompanies aging in men, do advances in medication frustrate the ability of men to age well? Furthermore, how does culture and cohort influence aging well?

Clearly, more research is needed to answer these questions. Thus far, research has failed to sufficiently explore the ramifications related to men's successful aging. Also under question is whether the roles of older men and women vary to such a degree that practitioners should move toward differential assessment and intervention strategy.