**Example Reflection Paper**

Adult Development: Service Learning Reflection

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Late Adulthood: Service Learning and Life Review Project

During this Adult Development class, I learned a lot about the mental, cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional aspects of aging from our class discussions and textbook material. It was interesting to see the age and background diversity among our class participants, not excluding our encounters with the Women of West Oakland and the Sisters of Mercy. It was a very valuable learning experience for me to be able to apply the concepts learned in the classroom and online to the physical people we encountered. From all of the chapters in the textbook, I learned many terms for concepts that I knew, but did not understand the real definition and impact that they had on aging. I want to reflect on the different chapters that we encountered and talk about them and their meaning in regards to aging, as well as the relationships that they had with the elderly women that we encountered during our tea parties.

In chapter one, Cavanaugh discusses the definition of the lifespan perspective, which “divides human development into two phases: [the] early phase (childhood and adolescence) and [the] later phase (young adulthood, middle age, and old age)” (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 4). The later phase was the basis for this class; it demonstrated that we were learning about the second part of life. Another definition that was seen repeatedly throughout the course was multidirectionality. Its definition is “development involves both growth and decline; as people grow in one area, they may lose in another and at different rates” (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 4). The reason this definition was important to the class content is because it showed that the declines that occur in life also come with some gains as well. If the older person would be losing their ability to remember what they ate for breakfast, their ability to remember the past might have increased greatly. There were numerous areas where this idea of multidirectionality came into play within our course, whether we were talking about young adulthood, middle age, or old age. Every age range has their gains and losses in their aging processes.

Some forces of development that we discussed in class and were seen in our tea party observations were biological, psychological, and life-cycle forces. Their definitions are: biological forces, “*all genetic and health-related factors that affect development*” and psychological forces, “*all internal perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and personality factors that affect development*” (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 13).

Both of these forces were demonstrated in classroom discussion, in our textbook readings, and in our interactions with the ladies involved with the tea parties. We discussed biological forces quite a bit in the beginning of the semester and saw the concept throughout the class. It was possibly the number one topic that was discussed because it is such a major factor of the aging process. We talked about the genetic and health-related factors of life in detail, from how people act or interact in certain social situations and why people age differently.

Psychological forces were also discussed extensively throughout the course. It was interesting to see the comparisons and connections of the psychological forces and the physical aspects of aging. I was intrigued to find out the ways that the brain ages and how it affects the physical aspects of human development. Psychological forces are the reasons why certain people are put into different forms of care homes when they are much older. If they cannot remember to dress themselves or if they cannot remember to feed themselves, they may need to be placed in assisted living or a nursing home (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 162). Some of the options elderly people could think about, as far as living conditions are concerned, are home modification, where the house is rearranged for the needs of the individual, adult day care, where there is *support, companionship, and certain services during the day*” (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 160), congregate housing, like condominiums for older couples or individuals who do not want to be in a nursing home, who want their independence, but would still like to interact with people of their own age, assisted living facilities where those who need help with everyday personal tasks such as brushing their teeth, bathing, dressing or taking medications (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 162). I always have found it interesting that older individuals who are still physically and mentally able to live by themselves still like to be out doing things in the community and those who are not able to live by themselves are generally pleasant to be in the living arrangement that their families have decided for them, as they sometimes forget where they are. I am not saying that there are not exceptions to this observation, but it is still interesting to me that this phenomenon happens. Maybe it is because I do not know how I would feel about living in a nursing home or assisted living environment because I am so independent.

A big factor that I found to be interesting is that the course was split up into young, middle, and older adult modules. I did not care for the young module because I am living/ already lived through that. The middle aged module did not excite me too much because I experience that module through living at home with my parents, interacting with my teachers, and coworkers. The module that interested me the most was the older adult module. I only have one grandparent still alive, I do not get to see him as much as I would like and I do not have much experience with older adults past my parents’ age. I was interested to see the reasoning behind why they have aged and how I will age. I wanted to see the scientific evidence behind the hypotheses that are made regarding aging.

In Chapter 3 of the Cavanaugh textbook, there is a whole chapter dedicated to the physical aspects of aging. This was my favorite chapter because it gave me the answers to the questions that were discussed in class. In the PowerPoint handout for Chapter 3, it says on the sixth slide some reasons that explain the wear-and–tear and rate-of-living theories. The reasons were: “Moderate to vigorous exercise throughout life also predicts longevity...Taking it *too* easy, associated with cognitive and physical decline…Body can repair itself under normal circumstances” (Wilsey, n.d.). The reasoning about moderate to vigorous exercise makes a great deal of sense. If one is active and works on their physical and cardiovascular health, they will live longer than people who are couch potatoes. As said in the second point about taking it too easy physically will lead to mental and physical decline in old age, this is extremely true because there are some people who have never gone outside and done something physical and later end up with mental diseases later in their lives. My favorite point is regarding that the body will repair itself is fascinating since I am an Anatomy buff. The body will fix itself when the individual takes care of their injuries and does not do things to re-injure the area. The human body is absolutely fascinating to me so this chapter was the one that made the most sense to me and fascinated me the most.

Also in Chapter 3, it talked about the changes in skin, hair and eyes that come along with getting older. Why do we get wrinkles? This phenomenon is caused by sun exposure throughout a lifetime without a proper SPF protection, along with other genetic and environmental aspects (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 70-71). It also discussed the reasons behind grey hairs, facial hair on women, and the gender differences that come along with aging. Women are likely to gain facial hair due to increased levels of the hormone, testosterone (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 71). The most interesting aspect of the physical changes that occur to older individuals is the loss of eye sight. I am twenty years old and have to wear glasses for reading when I am up late and my eyes are strained due to reading too much. I dread putting on my glasses to read, let alone having to wear them everyday to get out of bed and read the newspaper. I understand the concepts of how the eye works and how its functions decline with age, but this chapter presented these concepts in a unique manner. It discussed the reasons why the eye cannot let in as much light as it used to in order to see things clearly (Cavanaugh, 2010, p.78) and how the retina goes through physical changes involving the cone and rod receptors in the eye which also cause vision problems (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 79). The concepts regarding presbyopia (causing difficulty seeing objects up close), glaucoma (when there is fluid and pressure build up in the eye), and cataracts (deposits in the eye that cause opaque spots in eye sight) (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 79) are also interesting because these are physical changes that happen to many people as they get older. These three diseases of the eye are major causes of eyesight among older individuals.

The biggest connection that I saw with the text and the tea parties involving the Ladies of West Oakland and the Sisters of Mercy was the four types of leisure activities. The cultural, physical, social, and solitary aspects of the leisure activities were seen at our parties (Cavanaugh, 2010, p. 477). As for the cultural part, tea parties are a part of Carlow University’s culture because Catherine McCauley was known for “A Comfortable Cup of Tea”. The physical aspect was seen when all of the older Sisters and WoWo’s came with their walkers and those who were walking real slowly to their tables. It was their physical activity for the day to come down to the Activity Room in the Convent. They all socialized with each other at their tables and with the students in the class hosting the party. They seemed to have had a wonderful time playing bingo, eating their food, and getting to know the students. The students seemed to have a good time getting to know the Sisters, as well. The solitary aspect was seen when there were a few Sisters or WoWo’s who came in and sat by themselves at secluded tables. There was always the question of were they waiting for someone or did they just want to be by themselves. This was a very interesting phenomenon to watch unfold at the tea parties, especially since it occurred at both parties.

Alex and I got to know a few of the Sisters at the second party fairly well. They asked us about our families, relationship statuses, majors in school, about our jobs, and anything else they could think of. It was really nice to talk to them and to come to the realization that a good majority of them were over the age of ninety years old. I was astonished to hear this because some of them did not look or act ninety; they only seemed to be sixty or seventy. There was one little Sister in particular that took a liking to both A-- and myself. I believe her name was Jane and she said that she was ninety-one years old. She used to be the President of Carlow University for over sixteen years. She was so interested about why my major was Chemistry and what I wanted to do with my degree when I graduated. Another Sister, who was in front of me in line to get food, was mad at me because I switched my major from nursing last year. Both of her nieces are nurses and she is friends with the Dean of the Nursing School really well and told me go speak to her. I thought this was really funny because that is all she talked about for the entire party when I would pass her table or sit and talk with her. I definitely would not mind going back to throw another party for the Sisters because they were the cutest little old ladies and were so welcoming, sweet, and grateful that we were there to celebrate the holidays.

In reflection of the party preparation, I think it was a little rough, but both parties came together in the end leading the parties to success. There was a lot of class discussion, but when it came to trying to put the details together, it proved to be difficult. It would have been nice to have a budget for each party. Also, I think there could have been a little bit more class preparation to get things together physically, not just talking about what might happen. Maybe we could have helped decorate the cookies or made the centerpieces in the classroom, that way everyone could have been involved instead of just one or two people. I understand that a lot of the suggestions that were made were not probable because of the class meeting once or twice a week and not on consecutive days. There were so many ideas that were given for the parties that would have made the parties spectacular, but it was difficult to implement them due to the time frames and class schedule. The major suggestion that I have would be to not make the first party so late in the semester. There should have been one a little bit earlier in the semester and the second one should have been at the beginning of the Christmas season.

Overall, I think the parties were a great success as we got to know the Sisters of Mercy and the Ladies of West Oakland. It was nice to see the textbook’s context actually implemented and experienced within the parties. Since I am not around older people often, it was a great opportunity to see how they interact with younger people and people their own age. The class material was very interesting to read and the projects were an opportunity to reflect on the text and the experiences that we had in the classroom, and during our parties. I will not soon forget the experiences that came along with the diversity of students in the classroom and the interactions with the text at our tea parties.