



Living Through the Decades in Norfolk, Virginia: An Oral History

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Introduction

This oral history project was produced to learn more about an individual that is 55 years or older. This research project allows the researcher to make connections between the interviewee's stories and the concepts that we have learned in regards to aging and the life course. This project also allows us to ask the question: what happens as we age; mentally, physically, and emotionally.

For this project the interviewee is my maternal grandmother, Linda Porter. She is 72 years and has lived a majority of her time in Norfolk, VA. Throughout the interview she describes scenarios and her thoughts from her life as a child, an adult, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and now a caregiver.

Methods

Designing this research project involved the following criteria:

- Population of interest: individuals over the age of 55 years
- Sample size: one interviewee
- Criteria for inclusion: individuals over the age of 55 years of age that are important to me or would like to share their stories
- Criteria for exclusion: individuals that do not wish to share their stories; those that are not of age; and, those who do not wish to be recorded.

Creating this research project first started with analyzing who over the age of 55 that I would want to interview. When the interviewee was decided I asked them for permission to be recorded, as well as, if they would like to have a picture or for the recording to be archived at Longwood University. Once, I discussed that information I had them sign the consent agreement. The recording process took place in a quiet, comfortable environment with minimal excess noise. I recorded the interview on my cell phone with the Voice Memo app. After the interview is completed the audio needed to be transcribed. Following the transcription process the interview is coded and separated into different themes. Looking at the coded excerpts with categorized themes it can them be related to our literature.

Themes

There were three major themes that could be identified in the oral history with Linda: life experiences, health changes, and family.

A major aspect of the interview was recollection of favorite memories and activities with Linda's loved one's. Many excerpts focused on times that impacted her positively through her life.



"Ocean View amusement park, I remember -I remember the little train that we used to ride that go round and round and the roller coaster and just waiting to be old enough to ride that roller coaster and just going there and in fact both my girls you know they would- they were still- Well they were still before they tore it down. They were still young but we would still go there if nothing else to watch the people."

Changes in health are often a hot topic with aging individuals- health problems will face everyone. Her stance of advancing age and health was interesting. She discusses the health problems her husband face as a result of genetics and aging. She also spoke of how she feels as she ages.

"He had a massive heart attack. You know how he died but he had stents put in so his arteries and come to find out that was what happened to his father and his older brother. So... Yes it does hereditary. Something to look forward to isn't it. Yeah such good genes. "

In response to how old do you feel- in terms of chronological age. "You know it's funny I see all these old people and I know they're my age...I just feel like I don't- you know. And when they look so old and they're older than I am or younger than I am it's just amazing. Yeah. But. How do I feel. I don't know. Sometimes I feel a hundred and sometimes I feel 50 you know"

Lastly, one of the most pronounced themes in the interview was the importance of family in Linda's life. In many of her stories she spoke of her deep connections with her mother and her sisters, and further with her daughters and granddaughters.

When asked what she would like to be remembered for in 100 years she responded, "A 100 years from now? Oh I guess my family. Family means a lot. You know I hope all y'all are well. Well you'll be dead too won't you... Yeah just hopefully. That I was a good mother and a good grandmother..."



Connection to Literature

When creating questions for this oral history I strived to showcase a broad coverage of many of the things mentioned in the text and in class. A couple outstanding concepts included caregiver stress and marriage and aging.

"Caregiver stress... refers to the strain felt by the caregiver." (Quadagno, 2014). My grandmother describe the stress of caring for 97 year old mother and the increasing need for her older sisters need to care. "It's hard you know especially now because she doesn't remember or you know. And I guess it could be I guess it will gradually get worse".

My grandmother's marriage was great for her, her and my grandfather were married for 43 years when he died. She spoke of their marriage; their struggles, what brought them together, and how she was effected when he died. Our book states, "widowhood is mentally and physically devastating for most people (Quadagno, 2014). That was the exact case for my grandmother, "I mean I've always had good times with your grandpa. I just miss him so much".

Conclusion

Facilitating an oral history was an amazing opportunity to learn more about my family. One limitation that I noticed was that I wanted to ask specifically my grandmothers history, I didn't best design my questions to pull information to make specific connections to topics we learned in class. I had a couple topics I was specifically interested in, but if I were to do it again I would ask less vague questions that only elicited story telling responses. With that in mind, I learned more than I was even anticipating. It allowed a deeper connection from what we are learning from the text and class to the real life.

References

Quadagno, Jill S. *Aging and the Life Course: An Introduction to Social Gerontology*. Sixth Edition ed., McGraw-Hill Education, 2014.