

The Anthropology of Aging

Class: 9:55 - 11:40 O'Conr 205, Tuesday, Thursday
 Instructor: Dr. M. E. Hegland, O'Conr 318, 554-4646
 Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday 3:30 - 4:00 Or by appointment

Course Description:

Until the last couple of decades, anthropologists conducted little research about aging and the elderly. Was this failure a reflection of the lack of importance given to the elderly in Western society? Now, however, the new field of the anthropology of aging is dynamic and growing—maybe having something to do with growing aging populations.

Age is one of the main ways of dividing people into groups, categorizing, and assigning role, status, and importance in all societies; however, attitudes towards the aging process and the elderly differ considerably in different cultures and change over time. Through readings and films, in this course we will consider what age means in various cultures, the considerations used to put people into different age groups, how a person's position and power change throughout the life cycle, and how social change affects the power of aging individuals. We will consider the conditions, resources, and strategies which lead to positive lives for the elderly, what changes will improve the lives of the elderly, and how such changes might be brought about. We will consider the conditions and sources for power, influence, and agency for the elderly and how they are able to find positions and activities which provide status, prestige, and influence.

In thinking about these questions, we will look at the lives of elderly in other cultures and sub-cultures and how they are connected with power structures as well as at the elderly in our own society and how they interact with power structures. Hopefully, looking at the elderly in other cultures will give us new insights about the situation of the elderly in our own culture and society and the futures of all of us.

The spirit of the class will be one of active learning and cooperative inquiry, examination, and analysis. We will study anthropology using a hands-on approach: we will deal with both of the two main steps in anthropological inquiry: 1. description or the gathering and organizing of information, mainly through *participant observation* and in-depth, open-ended interviewing over long term contact, and 2. analysis or the interpreting and explaining of data to shed light on how and why things happen the way they do. The class will emphasize discussion and writing with the aim of exploring ideas and interconnections. Everyone is required to read, study, and think about the readings and to discuss the readings.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

Attendance is required. The class is a discussion/seminar/active learning class, and you certainly can not discuss or be active in the learning process if you aren't present. Students who have no absences will have better opportunity to earn a good class participation grade. Students are allowed **two unexcused absences only**. With each additional unexcused absence after two, your grade will be lowered by **a third of a grade**. If you are more than five minutes late or leave class early, it is counted as an absence. An absence can be excused only for serious and documented reason and only if I am notified before hand and given printed documentation on the day you return to class. Each student is responsible for signing the attendance sheet.

Participation is required. Students should actively engage in gathering material and thinking about aging and the elderly in American society and elsewhere. I will call on students if necessary. Contribution to class discussion is an important part of the grade. Students are expected to discuss concepts and ideas and do more than just add information to the conversation. They are expected to probe the material and come to new insights. **Students are to share responsibility for the learning process and will be evaluated accordingly.** Just start talking!!! (See me if you have problems.)

Preparation is required. You cannot discuss or be active in the learning process without preparation. Students are expected to study assignments carefully, take notes, and to review and think about notes from readings, class lectures,

discussions and films. While you read the materials, list main issues, main points, and your thoughts and questions. You must be prepared at all times to discuss class materials. You should be prepared every day to write an in-class essay on the reading assignment for the day or on any other class materials, such as lecture material or films. Your answer must demonstrate that you have read and thought about the materials. There will be about 10 in-class essays, which will be graded with a check, check plus, check minus, or a zero. Two check minuses equals a zero. You are allowed one zero without affecting your grade. After one zero, with each addition zero, your grade will be lowered by **a third of a grade**. Studying the reading assignment before each class session and being prepared to discuss and write about it is the minimum requirement of the course. In this course, it is of the greatest importance to be prepared for each class.

In order to pass the course, all requirements must be completed. Plagiarism or cheating brings an automatic F for the course and perhaps more. See student handbook and handout on writing essays for the definition of plagiarism.

Promptness in fulfilling assignments is required. Essays or assignments may be completed late only if (1) I am notified beforehand and (2) the reason is serious and documented. Paper grades will go down by a third for each day or fraction of a day handed in late. Your essays must be handed in at the beginning of class on the day due.

Aims of the Course:

It is expected that the course will assist you to attain:

1. Anthropological Knowledge Related to Aging and the Elderly

We will work with some of the materials about the situation of the elderly in various cultures, their contributions to society, and the parameters on their lives and activities. What are some of the questions anthropologists have asked about aging and the elderly? What are some of the anthropological concepts and paradigms developed to analyze and explain the situation of the elderly and attitudes towards the aging process? What are the lives of the elderly like in some different cultures and sub-societies? What are the expectations for the roles and behavior of the elderly in different cultures? How does the power of men and of women vary during their lifetimes and how much power and of what types do the elderly possess? What are the advantages and disadvantages of various societies for the elderly? How do economic conditions affect the elderly? How do rural-urban migration, international migration, and cultural disruption influence the elderly? How do relationships change during the aging process, and what can be the benefits or harm in relationships for the elderly? How do modernization, social change, and societal transformation affect the elderly? How do cultural values increase the stature of the elderly or relegate them to the dust bin? How do the elderly use communities, ethnic identity and groups, family and kin, roles, religion, and culture to develop meaning for their lives? What tactics do the elderly use to deal with others and to try to affect their own lives? How do the elderly attempt to change their situations? Are such efforts successful? Why or why not?

2. Knowledge about and Practice with the Process of Anthropological Inquiry as Applied to the Field of the Anthropology of Aging and the Elderly

We will study a number of examples of how anthropologists have collected and organized data about aging and the elderly. Using readings, films, class lectures, and your own observations as data, you will have a number of opportunities to collect, organize, analyze, and present anthropological findings in written and oral assignments, to develop an argument and support it with data, to do what anthropologists do.

To Gain Experience and Competence in the Process of Anthropological Inquiry as Applied to the Field of the Anthropology of Aging with a Hands-On Approach:

a. We will study a number of examples of how anthropologists have collected and organized data related to the anthropology of aging and how they have analyzed this data and presented the data and their analysis.

b. Using readings, films, class lectures, and your own observations as data, you will have a number of opportunities to collect, organize, analyze and present anthropological findings in shorter written and oral work-in-class essays, out-of-class essays, discussion, and presenting discussion reports.

c. Finally, having studied how a number of others have done it and having conducted a number of your own mini-anthropological research projects largely using data collected by others and presented in written work and films, you will have the opportunity to conduct anthropological description and analysis using data you collect yourself and to which you apply your own original analysis. The paper will be based on participant observation and/or interviewing on a topic related to the anthropology of aging. We will investigate aging and the elderly in a Northern Californian immigrant group: Iranian Americans. You will develop a research project in close cooperation with the professor and other students. We will prepare for it and work on it throughout the term, and you will present it at the end of the

term. We will work together on analysis, and from the various individual research projects, I will develop one joint paper to be presented at a conference with all of us as joint authors. Hopefully one or more students will decide to work together with me on a joint manuscript to be published in a journal.

Your knowledge about the process of anthropological inquiry will thus be acquired in three steps of ascending difficulty, and will culminate in your carrying out of an anthropological research project similar to those conducted by professional anthropologists except that it will be much shorter. Our work will include cooperative discussion and scholarly interaction as is the case among professional anthropologists.

3. Ability to Better Understand the Viewpoints and Situations of Aging Individuals in Various Societies Including Our Own and to Develop Insights and Ideas about What Factors and Conditions Are Important for Older People to Lead Meaningful, Contributing, Fulfilling Lives.

With the knowledge and abilities attained through the first two aims, you will be able to see with greater perceptiveness, avoiding common inaccurate myths and assumptions, what aging individuals and their lives are like in actuality in other cultures and in our own. You be able to understand insider points of view better, the views of the elderly and of others towards the elderly, in several different cultures. You will better understand the conditions and reasons leading to the parameters on the lives of the elderly. You will be able to more clearly see how your own life, opportunities, and choices will be influenced by aspects of culture and social forces, and will be able to better make decisions and plans to obtain what you want out of life and have the most fulfilling life possible. Hopefully, you will have a better idea about how to plan a positive life course and set up habits, conditions, and relationships which will contribute to your happiness and well-being throughout life. Maybe we will be able to develop preliminary ideas about what sort of changes would be positive for the lives of aging individuals in our own society and in other societies, perhaps even suggest plans and strategies about how such changes might be brought about--what we ourselves can do at the individual level and what might be done at higher levels.

Through enabling you to gain knowledge and understanding about the lives of the elderly, the conditions which influence their lives, and what might be done to improve their lives, both in this country and elsewhere, the course will provide you with preliminary training for working to improve the lives of the elderly in the U.S. and abroad. Such could be of practical application for you. You may wish to earn a Gerontology certificate through our program here at Santa Clara. You may chose to become professionally involved with an organization dealing with the elderly. Even if you do not, you will be dealing with aging individuals in your personal relationships more and more as time goes on. Demographically, our population is grower older. The knowledge and abilities attained through this course can thus be put to practical use in your personal life and in your work life.

If you are interested in the Gerontology Certificate Program, please contact Dr. Patti Simone of Psychology. For a anthropology major or minor, please see Dr. George Westermarck, Anthropology Section Head.

Required Readings: Available in the bookstore. Several articles will be available on e-res from the Library.

Sokolovsky, Jay, editor

1997 The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspectives (Second Edition), New York: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Lamb, Sarah

2000 White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Myerhoff, Barbara

1980 Number Our Days, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Reading Schedule:

(Take careful and comprehensive notes and list main issue, important points, and your thoughts and questions for all readings, films, and speakers. Take notes on contributions and discussion of other students as well as of professor.)

Tues. Jan. 6 Introduction – The Anthropological Approach, Introduction to the Anthropology of Aging

I. Resources, Roles, Strategies, and Interactions of the Elderly. What are the resources, roles, strategies, and interactions which older people use to develop meaningful, active, integrated lives for themselves? How do they try

to influence others and get what they want? What are the dynamics among the elderly and between elderly and others, as the elderly try to influence others and get what they want? What differences are there in the resources, roles, strategies, and interactions of women versus men?

- Thurs. Jan. 8 "Complaint Discourse, Aging, and Caregiving among the Ju/'hoansi of Botswana," Harriet G. Rosenberg, pp. 33-55 in Sokolovsky.
"Culture and the Meaning of a Good Old Age," Christine L. Fry, and others, pp. 99-123 in Sokolovsky.
- Tues. Jan. 13 "Grandparenting Styles: The Contemporary American Indian Experience," Joan Weibel-Orlando, pp. 139-155 in Sokolovsky.
"Age of Wisdom: Elderly Black Women in Family and Church," Jane W. Peterson, pp. 276-292 in Sokolovsky.
- Thurs. Jan. 15 "Exchange and Reciprocity among Two Generations of Japanese and American Women," Hiroko Akiyama, Toni C. Antonucci, and Ruth Campbell, pp. 163-178 in Sokolovsky.
"Bringing Culture Back Home: Aging, Ethnicity, and Family Support," Jay Sokolovsky, pp. 263-275 in Sokolovsky.
Review and Prepare for Essays and Presentation/Student Participation Activity

Tues. Jan. 20 **Essays Due. PRESENTATION/STUDENT PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

II. The Elderly and Change: Social and Cultural Change, Modernization, Urbanization, Immigration, Globalization. How has change affected the lives and situations of the elderly? How has change affected family, kinship, and community organization and dynamics, and what effects does this have for the elderly? How are the lives of elderly today different from those of elderly 50 or 100 years ago and why? What are the advantages and disadvantages for today's elderly versus those of past generations? How do elderly evaluate changes and the differences in lives of elderly? How do the elderly and their families, kin, and communities react to and cope with change?

- Thurs. Jan. 22 "African Widows, Culture and Social Change: Case Studies from Kenya," Maria G. Cattell, pp. 71-98 in Sokolovsky.
"Aging, Family and Community Development in a Mexican Peasant Village," Jay Sokolovsky, pp. 191-217 in Sokolovsky.
- Tues. Jan. 27 "Gender and Duty in Japan's Aged Society: The Experience of Family Caregivers," Brenda Robb Jenike, pp. 218-238 in Sokolovsky.
"History, Community Context and the Perception of Old Age in a Rural Irish Town," Jeanette Dickerson-Putman, pp. 364-373 in Sokolovsky.
- Thurs. Jan. 29 "The Social and Cultural Context of Adaptive Aging by Southeast Asian Elders," Barbara W.K. Yee, pp. 293-303 in Sokolovsky.
"An Organization for the Elderly, by the Elderly: A Senior Center in the United States," Yohko Tsuji, pp. 350-363.
Review and Prepare for Essays and Presentation/Student Participation Activity

Tues. Feb. 3 **Essays Due. PRESENTATION/STUDENT PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

III. Sarah Lamb's Aging, Gender, and Body in North India, a case study based on anthropological research in West Bengal, India. How do gender attitudes, roles, behaviors, and perceptions change over the life course? How are ideas and behaviors about bodies related to ideas and behaviors about gender and about aging? How do Bengali women's power and influence change over their life-times and why, in the village where Lamb did her research? How do Bengali women look at their lives, families, and social relations, and present them to others? How do they try to get what they want and influence others? How do love and *maya* ("a 'net' of bodily and emotional ties") get built up over the years and then decline in later life?

Thurs. Feb. 5 *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, Lamb, pp. 27- 111 (If really too pressed for time, it is ok to read only to 69, and make up the rest over the weekend.)

Tues. Feb. 10 *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, Lamb, pp. 112-178

Thurs. Feb. 12 *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, Lamb, pp. 181-212, skim 213-245
Review and Prepare for Essays and Presentation/Student Participation Activity

Tues. Feb. 17 **Essays Due. PRESENTATION/STUDENT PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

IV. Barbara Myerhoff's classic anthropological study of an aging Eastern European Jewish community in Venice, California: *Number Our Days*. How did these disappearing elderly cope with old age and loss of culture, family, society, and community? How did they find and create meaning in their lives and history and their current existence? How could they bring about transformation of self, position in society, and social transformation? How did the women's strategies, resources, and interaction styles differ from those of the men?

Thurs. Feb. 19 *Number Our Days*, Myerhoff, pp. 1- 39, 79-112, and skim Chapter 2, 40-78 about Shmuel Goldman the tailor. (If really pressed for time, it is ok to just read 1-39 and then make up 79-112 over the weekend.)

Tues. Feb. 24 *Number Our Days*, Myerhoff, pp. 153-231

Thurs. Feb. 26 *Number Our Days*, Myerhoff, pp. 232-268
Review and Prepare for Essays and Presentation/Student Participation Activity

Tues. Mar. 2 **Essays Due. PRESENTATION/STUDENT PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

V. Aging and the Elderly in Iran and among Iranian Americans in the Santa Clara Valley. How have social-cultural transformation in Iran and emigration to the U.S. influenced the lives of Iranian and Iranian American older people? What are some of the difficulties and challenges that older Iranian immigrants face in the U.S., and what are the reasons for them? How do they view their lives and their current situations? How do they cope with their current conditions? How do they find and create meaning in their lives and current existence? How do the lives, activities, and views of older Iranian females differ from those of males? What aspects of their own culture do they use for their lives, and in what ways do they change their lives, activities, and attitudes to adjust to living in the Santa Clara Valley? What are some not-so-productive ways in which they react to their situations, and what are some positive steps they take?

Thurs. Mar. 4 "Zip In and Zip Out Fieldwork," Mary Elaine Hegland, forthcoming in *Iranian Studies*, and a couple of conference abstracts.

"Elderly Afghan Refugees: Traditions and Transitions in Northern California," Patricia A. Omidian and Juliene G. Lipson, in Selected Papers in Refugee Issues, ed. Pamela A. DeVoe, Published by the Committee on Refugee Issues, of the American Anthropological Association.

Work on preparing research data and writing papers.

Tues. Mar. 9 Oral Presentation of Student Papers.

Thurs. Mar. 11 Oral Presentation of Student Papers.

Research papers based on interviewing an older Iranian American due. (Two copies)

Congratulations!

Grading Policy for Anthropology 172, The Anthropology of Aging

Grades will be determined by consolidating the numerical values given to various contributions according to the following scale:

93: A, 89-92: A-, 86-88: B+, 83-85: B, 80-82: B-, 77-79: C+, 74-76: C,
70-73: C-, 66-69: D+, 62-65: D, 58-61: D-, 57 and below....F

As noted in your syllabus, students are allowed only two unexcused absences. For an excused absence, you must inform me ahead of time and bring printed documentation the first day back at class. With each unexcused absence after two, your grade goes down by a third of a grade. If you are more than five minutes late or leave class early, it counts as an absence.

Grades will be computed numerically and will be derived from the following requirements:

1. Class preparation and participation.....15%

You should come to class with a thorough knowledge of the material in the day's assignment, careful notes on the main ideas and themes in the material, your ideas and analysis of the material, and two or three good discussion questions. In other words, you must come to class prepared for informed and thoughtful discussion and writing on the reading material. *For each reading, list: a. main issues, b. main points, c. your thoughts and questions.* As much as possible, try to engage with the materials and the issues, contributing to class discussion in a creative, insightful, and knowledgeable manner. Quality as well as quantity of oral contributions to discussion are significant for grading. Important sources of grading in this area will be: participation in small group discussions, reporting to the class from small group discussions, class discussions, class debates, and participation during presentation/student participation activity.

2. Three essays, each worth 15% for a total of.....45%

A thoughtful, analytical, well-structured essay with an original, central thesis or argument based on each book must be handed in at the beginning of class on the day of the student presentation. Students must hand in **two** typed copies of each paper, one for me to grade and return and the other for my files. Papers must be at least two pages long and should be no longer than three pages. Students on the Presentation/Student Participation Activity team do NOT have to hand in a paper. Paper grades will be lowered by a third of a grade for each day or fraction of a day handed in late. See sheets on essays.

3. Presentation and guiding the student participation activity.....20%

Class members will be divided into four groups and each group will be responsible for a creative, dynamic, and provocative presentation. Each group will also develop a creative way to engage other class members with the materials and issues, allowing them to apply and extend their knowledge and insights. Each group will be prepared to answer questions, and lead discussion of the text and the issues it introduces. Each group will have to meet outside of class in order to plan, organize, and research the presentation and discussion. Start early with your preparations. See sheet on presentations and student participation activity leadership.

4. Fieldwork Essay Based on Interviewing One Elderly Iranian American.....20%

The last section of the course will be devoted to applying the knowledge, ideas, and perspectives gained through class materials to preparing for and conducting research with an older Iranian American, and then developing a paper and oral presentation based on the description and analysis of this interviewing. This assignment will provide practice in actually doing what anthropologists do, actually being involved in anthropological research in a local community. See sheets on interviewing paper.

Additional impact on grading: Periodically, announced and unannounced essays on the readings and other class materials will be given. Such essays will serve to give you (a) a reality check make sure you have understood the material, (b) opportunity to integrate course material in a thoughtful and insightful manner, (c) opportunity to think about and extend your insights about the material, (d) preparation for small group and class discussions, (e) practice in writing and analysis to help for the longer essays, and (f) opportunity to help develop ideas and arguments for the longer, out-of-class essays.

Please remember that attendance is required: with each unexcused absence after two, your grade goes down by 1/3. Perfect attendance and high scores on in-class essays will improve your final grade, especially if it is on the edge.