How Inequality Shapes Later Life

Lessons from the Everyday Experiences of Aging People

Corey M. Abramson, Ph.D.
University of Arizona
Two Facts

The population is aging.

Aging remains unequal.
Inequality's End Game

- 2.5 years of participant observation in four urban neighborhoods (~2000 hours of field observation)
- 60 in-depth interviews with women and men from different racial and SES groups
- Shows intertwined mechanisms of inequality
A Model of Unequal Aging

I. Who gets to play? [Health disparities]

II. Organizing Mechanics [Shared challenges]

III. Uneven playing field [Structural inequalities]

IV. Team dynamics [Network inequalities]

V. Styles of play [Experience and culture]
Why Does Jane Skip Chemo While Laney Goes?

- Jane (65 yrs old, Wh, Baygardens)
- Laney (64 yrs old, Wh, Baygardens)
- Not (Information + Access + Resources = Behavior)
- Different Cultural Responses to Illness: “preserving the body” versus “maximizing enjoyment”
- Seen throughout the *End Game* as well as new project on responses to terminal cancer
Why Culture Matters

• Culture contains shared understandings
• Grounded in prior (unequal) circumstances
• With a powerful moral component
• That reflects past experiences
• And shapes meaningful responses to the present
Implications

• Necessary to be attentive to inequality in models of aging
• Opportunities for healthy longevity are unequal
• Interventions remain uneven and piecemeal
• Understanding experience and culture is important for effective policy
• Necessary to continue to advance measurement at both the micro- and macro-level
Thank you!

Corey M. Abramson, Ph.D.

Email: coreyabramson@email.arizona.edu

Web: http://cmabramson.com/