

Aging in Society-Socl 342
Summer 2019
Dept. of Sociology
Western Kentucky University

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Text

Aging Concepts and Controversies 9th edition. Harry R. Moody and Jennifer R. Sasser. Sage, 2018. ISBN: 978-1506328003

Course Description:

The United States' population is aging at a rapid rate. A variety of social circumstances are causing this rapid aging, the result will be a society structured like we have never in history seen before. This course will utilize a sociological perspective to examine the causes and consequences of this change at macro and micro levels of analysis.

Course Goals:

1. Analyze how systems evolve

Students will analyze the basis and evolution of social policies and programs which care for the needs of an aging society. Specifically the economic systems (surplus deferral), medical system (healthcare), family system (caregiving) and political system (regulation). Students will analyze how and why these systems began and how they have impacted and changed over time and how these systems might continue to change.

2.) Compare the study of individual components to the analysis of entire systems

In this course students will analyze the macro social systems and how they impact the individual. For example, social security and employer based retirement plans plus Medicare, allow for widespread retirement in the United States. Widespread retirement though, has to be understood within the context of cultural attitudes about the skills and abilities of aging people. Within that context, an examination of individual decisions to retire can be examined along with how those policies impact social inequality across minority groups in our society.

3.) Evaluate how system-level thinking informs decision-making, public policy, and/or the sustainability of the system itself.

Students will evaluate how the existence and maintenance of social systems creates and sustains cultural patterns and policies in the United States. For example, a nuclear family system with one adult who has reduced economic power increases the reliance on family caregiving to meet the needs of aging members of that family. This then, reduces public pressure on government responsibility to pay for long term caregiving for the elderly. Likewise, the social security financing was based upon expectations that a population would consist of a large group of working aged people who had strong wages and a small group of elderly. The unanticipated aging of society has put that system in economic peril. Proposed solutions vary in the consequences

Blackboard

You can click on this [weblink to blackboard \(http://blackboard.wku.edu\)](http://blackboard.wku.edu) This course will be conducted entirely through WKU's web based class administration website.

To begin the course, simply log in to Blackboard, select this course and click on the main menu button, "Begin here." There you will find a copy of the syllabus and videos that explain the course.

The course is set up as three units. Within each unit are folders or "modules" which cover a single topic. In addition, in that folder you will find any assignments related to that module, such as a quiz or a writing assignment. Each Unit has a due date and everything in that unit must be completed by the following deadlines. No late work will be accepted! Once a deadline is passed, you may not go back and complete any work within that deadline. Of course, working ahead is perfectly acceptable!

Unit 1: All work including: quizzes, writing assignments, discussion board posts, and the first exam must be completed. **July 16 11:59 PM CST**

Unit 2: All work including: quizzes, writing assignments, discussion board posts, and the second exam must be completed. **July 25, 11:59 PM CST**

Unit 3: All work including: quizzes, writing assignments, discussion board posts, and the third exam must be completed. **Saturday August 3, 11:59 PM CST**

Course Requirements:

Writing Assignments:

The textbook seeks to increase the student's understanding of gerontology through the presentation of controversial topics. In order to fully utilize the approach of the text, students must engage in the controversies, not simply understanding the two sides of the controversies, but also critically engaging the controversies and determining where the student's attitudes may lie in each of the controversies. To that end, there will be 9 opportunities to complete a writing assignment, from these 9 opportunities, **2** writing assignments must be completed. These writing assignments will usually be based upon assigned questions from the end of each chapter, or the question will be indicated on the syllabus or blackboard.

Each answer should be in essay format: thorough, well thought out, word processed, a minimum of one and one half pages double spaced in length, 10 or 12 pt font, one inch margins, use proper grammar, spelling etc. You must utilize (cite!) information from your text, lecture, or outside sources as evidence to support your argument in each answer. You must use proper citation (MLA or APA); this is to be sure that you are clear when you are expressing your ideas versus repeating the text ideas. Each writing assignment is worth 10 points. There are 9 of these writing assignments listed on the syllabus, you must complete **two** of the nine. Choose the assignments that interest you, or that you feel you can successfully answer. However, you must complete at least one writing assignment in the first Unit. You may only complete one writing assignment per module (oftentimes I give you a choice between two questions to answer, only one can be chosen). Please plan out your writing assignment schedule so that you can meet these expectations! All assignments should be submitted through the assignment feature on blackboard. Please note the only document formats which I can open are: .pdf .doc .docx .rtf or .txt. (This list does not include the word processing format of "Word perfect" (.wps) or the

“Pages” word processing format nor can I open google docs! Documents that cannot be opened will not be graded.)

If you choose, you may turn in a third assignment that will count as extra credit. However, you can only submit 1 writing assignment in Unit 3 (This eliminates a huge pile of grading during which I have limited time to complete it due to the timeline of submitting final grades). So if you want to do extra credit, you must plan ahead to fit in two papers within units 1 and/or 2. Once a unit deadline has passed, you may not go back and answer a writing assignment from that unit for extra credit.

Quizzes

Important: You must download the Lockdown Browser in order to take the examinations. This software prohibits you from accessing files or searching the internet on your computer while taking the exams. You can download the Lockdown Browser (free) from the Software tab at the top of the Blackboard screen. In order to take the examinations, you must close every program on your computer and then open the Lockdown Browser. You may then log into Blackboard from the Lockdown Browser and take the exam.

Students must read and learn the material from the textbook. To encourage thorough reading and learning, the completion of quizzes will be required for every chapter covered in the textbook. While any material is “fair game” for a quiz, the quizzes will especially focus on the “readings” portion of the textbook chapters. These are the assigned readings which present both sides of the controversy under consideration in a particular chapter. You will be required to complete timed, 5 point, 5 question quizzes. You will be allowed to use your text and your reading notes to aid in the completion of the quiz, however, because the quiz is timed, if you have not read thoroughly, or taken notes, you will not have time to “look up” the correct answers.

Over the course of the semester, there will be 12 quizzes. 12 quizzes times 5 points each equals a possible 60 points from quizzes. I will not reset a quiz if you go over the time limit or if your computer crashes during the quiz. However, instead of a messed up quiz counting as 0, I simply adjust the points possible from quizzes to account for the fact that occasional trouble can occur with the on-line quizzes. To that end, 50 points will be counted toward your final grade from quizzes. This means that you can “mess up” two quizzes and it will not hurt your grade. If you never encounter any problems with the quizzes, any points you earn in excess of 50 will count as extra credit.

It is considered cheating if you take the quiz with assistance from a friend, or allow a friend to “watch” you complete the quiz. Instances of cheating will be referred to the University office of Judicial affairs.

Exams:

Important: You must download the Lockdown Browser in order to take the examinations. This software prohibits you from accessing files or searching the internet on your computer while taking the exams. You can download the Lockdown Browser (free) from the Software tab at the top of the Blackboard screen. In order to take the examinations, you must close every program on your computer and then open the Lockdown Browser. You may then log into Blackboard from the Lockdown Browser and take the exam.

There will be three exams for this course. Each exam will be worth 50 points. Exams will be multiple-choice format, consisting of 50 questions, each worth one point. Exams will be administered through blackboard. You will be allowed to take each exam at your convenience, but you must do it by the designated deadline. Mind you: you can take an exam early, but to make sure that everyone is pacing themselves properly, there is an exam deadline. There will be a timer on each exam limiting you to 55 minutes (the same amount of time as you would have in a face to face class). You will be on the honor system for the exams, meaning that you may not refer to your text or to your notes while completing the exam.

Final essay.

In order to demonstrate competence in regards to the “systems” portion of this course, you are required to submit a final essay. See blackboard, Unit 3 for more information. This essay will be due on the same date as Unit 3.

Grading:		Your grade will be calculated as a percentage of total points.
Lifecourse assignment	10 pts	A=90% or points 221-245
Writing assignments	20 pts	B=80% or points 196-220
Quizzes	50 pts	C=70% or points 172-195
Final essay	15 pts	D=60% or points 147-171
Exams	150 pts	
Total Points	245	

Disability services

“In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact Student Disability Services in Downing University Center, A-200. The phone number is 270-745-5004. Please DO NOT request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from Student Disability Services.”

Title IX Misconduct/Assault Statement

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) at [Link to titled 9 WKU sexual harassment policy](#) and

Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) at [link to WKU title 9 discrimination policy](#)

Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.

*Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are “Responsible Employees” of the University and **MUST** report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.*

Course Schedule:

Dates indicate when I expect to begin covering a topic. Exact due date of quiz/writing assignments will be announced in class.

➔ This symbol indicates material that will be quizzed and a writing assignment option is available.

Review of syllabus and Introductions

Course Schedule:

It can be difficult to predict the pace of any given course. I reserve the right to alter due dates/assignments/exams as necessary for the benefit of the course.

Dates are approximate and indicate when I expect to begin covering a topic. Exact due date of quiz/writing assignments will be announced in class.

➔ This symbol indicates material that will be quizzed and a writing assignment option is available.

Prologue

Chapter goal: 1.) Utilize the demographic transition theory to explain population aging.

2.) Illustrate why our society should be concerned about population aging.

Reading Assignment: Pages xxiii-xxxi in your assigned textbook. Also read Controversy 11, pps 443-455 in your assigned textbook.

Vocabulary: Baby boom generation, Population Aging, birth cohorts, demographic transition theory, population pyramid.

Basic Concepts I: The life course perspective

Chapter Goals: 1.) Discuss the approach to aging in American society.

2.) Compare and contrast theories of aging.

3.) Describe the mechanisms of physical aging.

Reading Assignment: Basic Concepts I, pps 1-27 in your assigned textbook.

Lifecourse trajectory assignment.

Important vocabulary: Be sure to learn the definitions of all the bolded terms in the assigned reading.

Controversy 2: Why do our bodies grow old?

Chapter goal(s) 1.) determine the difference between usual and inevitable biological changes with age.

2.) Classify the various theories regarding why the body changes.

3.) Describe age related changes to the body and predict how these biological changes will impact our society.

4.) Describe changes in life expectancy over the past 100 years. 5.) Articulate the compression of morbidity debate.

➔ Reading assignment: Controversy 2: Why do our Bodies Grow Old. pp 55-72. Readings 6 (pp 75-82) and 7 (pp 82-84) Quiz!

➔ Writing assignment: Answer ONE of the following questions:

A.) In your opinion, how much emphasis should be placed on promoting health versus curing diseases in old age? What are the benefits AND consequences of emphasizing one over the other? Think both of benefits and consequences at the individual level as well as at the societal level. Refer to the reading

assignments for support for your answer. What if prevention/curing disease succeeded in significantly prolonging the human life span? (or life expectancy?) Is your guess that it will be simply extending years of life or might it be extending a healthy period of living? What might be the consequences at the individual and the societal level if either event occurs. Refer to the text to support your answer.

B) Write a science fiction or imaginary scenario of how the United States might look in 50-75 years if dramatic breakthroughs in the genetics of aging occur. In developing this scenario, be sure to state the key discoveries or inventions to occur and describe the likely social and individual consequences of those discoveries. Be sure to reference the text in terms of theories of why the body ages. You are also encouraged to use a resource from outside the course material--properly cite everything, of course!

Controversy 3: Does intellectual function decline with age?

Chapter goals: 1.) Explain the different ways in which intelligence is measured as well as the difficulties in measuring intelligence.
2.) Describe how the different types of intelligence change with age.
3.) Extend the discussion of biological changes and intellectual changes with age to a discussion of driving capabilities of older Americans.

→ Reading assignment: Controversy 3: Does Intellectual Functioning Decline with Age? pp 97-108.
Readings 11 and 12 (pp 109-118) Quiz!

→ Answer one of the following:

- A. Discuss Dennis's critique of Lehman's argument that creativity inevitably declines after middle age. Do you agree or disagree with Dennis's skepticism? Make sure you briefly overview the main points of each author and then discuss the points you find were strong or weak and how that overall sways your position about intelligence and age. Be sure to also add your own critiques of either Lehman or Dennis as they are relevant.
- B. Consider the issue of the elderly driving, you might want to begin by thinking about the value you place on driving in your own life, then consider the issue from a societal level and from that of an elderly person. What are the consequences to the individual if he or she can no longer drive (consider both urban and rural areas), what are the consequences to society if an elderly person cannot drive (or is no longer a safe driver)? In our society, what institution should be responsible for regulating drivers and why, particularly as they age--some examples might be the family, the government, the medical field. Should an older age be the criteria used to regulate driving? Why or why not? Be sure to cite evidence from your text when addressing these questions.

Controversy 1: Does old age have meaning?

Chapter goals: 1.) Discuss leisure patterns in late life as well as spirituality.

2.) Compare and contrast various approaches to finding meaning in old life.

→ Read: Controversy 1: Does Old Age have meaning? pp 29-41 and readings 1, 2, 3, and 4 pp 42-53).
Quiz!

→ Answer the following question:

Is the idea of "meaning" in life something purely personal and private--if you choose to find your own meaning in late life, so be it, if not so be it. Or should old age have some "meaning" to our wider society? Meaning as a society, should we ascribe special status and "meaning" to reaching old age? In either case, what changes either in simple terms such as culture or complicated terms, such as social policy could be made to facilitate this pursuit of meaning?

Basic Concepts III: Social and Economic Outlook.

Chapter goals: Understand sources of income in old age and illustrate how this varies among minority status groups.

Reading Assignment: "Basic Concepts III: Social and Economic Outlook pp. 297-329. (Please note this is out of "order" in terms of the layout of your text)

Controversy 9: What is the future for Social Security?

Chapter goals: 1.) Explain the funding of the Social Security Program and illustrate why there will be a funding shortage.

2.) Compare and contrast the benefits of Social Security across racial and class groups in the United States.

→ Readings Assignment: Controversy 9: What is the future of Social Security, pp 365-381. Readings 38-41, pp 382-399. Quiz!

→ Answer the following question:

What solution to social security would you most like to see implemented? What are the benefits and consequences (to individuals, to groups of individuals, to society) of implementing your proposed solution? Be sure to compare and contrast your preferred solution against one other solution. Be sure to cite evidence to support your answer.

Controversy 10: Is Retirement Obsolete?

Chapter goals. 1.) Describe the conditions that must exist in society for retirement to become a social institution.

2.) Describe trends in retirement in terms of age and gender.

→ Viewing Assignment: Go to the Con 10 folder in blackboard and watch the "Frontline documentary: Can you Afford to Retire?"

→ Reading Assignment: Controversy 10: Is retirement Obsolete? pp 401-420. Readings 43-46 pp 421-438. Quiz!

→ Answer the following question.

The authors of the assigned readings 43-46 present a variety of ideas regarding the use of a "retirement" period in the life course. Compare and contrast these perspectives. How do you perceive what the American cultural attitudes towards any of the ideas proposed by the authors. Further, do you believe there are generational differences in hopes/plans for retirement. For example, is what you hope and plan for in retirement what your parents/grandparents hope for/are doing? Are there changes that should be made at the societal level to accomplish any of the concepts/ideas proposed by the authors?

Basic Concepts II: Aging and Healthcare.

Chapter goals: Understand the major causes of illness in old age, how healthcare is financed in the United States and how personal care is delivered to frail older people in the United States.

Reading Assignment: "Basic concepts II: Aging, Healthcare and society" pp 133-166

Controversy 4: Should we ration healthcare?

Chapter goals: 1.) Describe lifestyle choices that negatively impact health.

2.) Describe the basis of and precedents to healthcare rationing.

3.) Compare and contrast the benefits and consequences of rationing healthcare.

➔ Reading Assignment: Controversy 4: Should we ration health care for older people? pp 167-184.

Readings 16, 18, and 19. pp185-191 and 192-196. Quiz!

➔ Answer one of the following:

Is Callahan cruel and hard hearted or is he instead courageous and far sighted in his willingness to advocate a controversial idea? Do family members and older Americans themselves already make rationing decisions? For example, at the funeral of an older person, mourners will often comfort one another by remarking, "He had a good long, life." If this is so, how is what Callahan proposing any different? Cite evidence from your text when answer this question.

Controversy 5: Should families provide for their own?

Chapter goals. 1.) Compare and contrast the gender differences in caregiving.

2.) Discuss the utilization and characteristics of high quality nursing homes.

3.) Discuss who bears the costs of caregiving to the elderly in terms of both individuals and society.

➔ Reading Assignments: Controversy 5: Should Families provide for their own? pp 201-213. Readings 21-25, pp 214-231. Quiz!

➔ Answer one of the following:

A. Is transfer of assets to qualify for Medicaid a form of "Middle class welfare" as asserted by Jane Bryant Quinn? Discuss both how it is and is not. Which groups in our society benefit and which groups are harmed by this transfer of assets. Cite evidence for your answer.

B) See blackboard for additional question options.

Controversy 6: Should older people be protected from bad choices?

Chapter Goals: 1.) Define the various forms of elder abuse in the United States.

2.) Describe late life patterns of sexuality.

➔ Reading Assignment: Controversy 6: Should older people be protected from bad choices? pp 237-249. Readings 27, 28, 29 pp 252-261. Quiz!

➔ Answer the following:

At the beginning of your chapter you read about Uncle Bert. Was uncle Bert "self neglecting" or just living his life as he wanted to? When it comes to deciding on matters of personal liberty, the law is supposed to treat adults alike regardless of age. The only basis for civil commitment is the combination of danger plus mental incapacity. Do you think the law should be rewritten to make an

exception for frail older people who are vulnerable to self neglect or mistreatment? Cite evidence from this chapter or the entirety of what you have learned this semester to support your answer.

Controversy 7: Should people have the choice to end their lives?

Chapter goals: 1.) Discuss the implementation and utilization of Oregon's "Death with Dignity Act."

2.) Discuss the process of grief and mourning in the United States.

➔ Reading Assignment: Controversy 7: Should people have the choice to end their lives? pp 265-277.

Readings 30, 31 and 33. (pp 278-286 and 288-294). Quiz! Be sure to also read the article by Sidney Hook located in the Con 7 blackboard folder.

➔ Answer the following:

Evaluate the Oregon Death with dignity act. Does it present the slippery slope that Leon Kass suggests in reading 33? Or does it have appropriate safeguards? Or perhaps the law is too restrictive? Consider the amount of power the physician holds in this act. Is this appropriate? Would a law such as this ever be passed in KY? Why or why not?