



Anthropology & Aging

Journal of the Association for Anthropology & Gerontology

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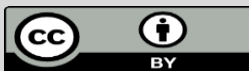
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Keywords: aging; time; future; life course; pandemic

Anthropology & Aging, Vol 41, No 2 (2020), pp. 90-92

ISSN 2374-2267 (online) DOI 10.5195/aa.2020.321



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AFTERWORD. Situating Time, Futurity, and Aging in the Pandemic

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How does time as a phenomenological experience relate to time as objectively measured? More particularly, how do people experience time when the time that remains is short? The authors of the articles collected here address these questions ethnographically, documenting how temporality, futurity, and purpose take shape in the context of aging across a range of settings.

Academic work itself also has, of course, its own rhythms and temporalities. During the relatively short time that this issue of AAQ has been in press, questions about time, experience, and aging have suddenly become far less abstract for millions of people, due to changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Time feels different. A meme that began circulating on the internet in mid-April quipped that “2020 is a unique leap year: it has 29 days in February, 300 in March, and 5 years in April!” As of this writing, in August 2020, several more months have passed, and many now speak with wonder and longing of the once-normal, now-forbidden activities of everyday life in what some now call “the Before Time.”

The pandemic thus invites reflection on the themes of time, meaning and aging that the essays in this collection address. Lockdowns imposed in an effort to stop the spread of the virus have forced millions of all ages to share the experience that has long been common among older adults, of being homebound with limited mobility. Infection-control measures that restrict hospital visits, funeral attendance, and flying have brutally transformed practices surrounding dying and mourning, with devastating effects on health workers as well as bereaved family members. The virus, which has proven particularly deadly for older adults, has also particularly affected health workers who care for them, especially in institutional settings – who tend, following fault lines of social inequality, to be people of color. Massive street protests against police killings of Black Americans, meanwhile, make obvious how aging itself, in other words the very possibility of growing old, is a right denied to many. Simultaneously, reports of otherwise healthy young people felled by the virus, also remind us that dying is not reserved for older people alone. With such thoughts in mind, these remarks touch briefly on just a few of the many themes running through these essays that seem to open particularly rich veins of insight and inquiry in this pandemic moment.

One striking theme is simply the co-presence of radically different experiences of time. In March 2020, *New York Times* reporter Jessica Lustig published an account of her experience of caring for her husband when he fell sick with COVID-19. In this piece, Lustig described the strangeness of realizing that her experience of time was radically unlike that of others:

It's as if we are in a time warp, in which we have accelerated at 1½ time speed, while everyone around us remains in the present — already the past to us — and they, blissfully, unconsciously, go about their ordinary lives... (Lustig 2020)

In shattering previous senses of temporality, and revealing time to be newly multiple and malleable, our collective experience of the pandemic may perhaps position many of us to appreciate the variability of time as a central dimension of the experience of aging.

Similar disjunctions and differences in how people experience time appear throughout the articles in this collection. In some instances, the disjunctions may occur within a single person's lifetime, as part of the experience of aging. Some of the Scottish older adults interviewed by Jane Elliott and J.D. Carpentieri, for example, invoke an established self from the past, as a means of occluding the feared self of the future. For Emily Wentzell's informants Ricardo and Itzel, meanwhile, a consciousness of themselves as aging in a deliberately "modern" fashion served both to create a disjunction from old age as experienced in generations past, and at the same time to situate their lives within an imagined trajectory of national progress. By contrast, in the South African frailcare home where Casey Golomski's research was based, Black and white residents' profoundly different historical experiences of Apartheid and its aftermath left staff and residents reluctant to situate their own aging within such national narratives, tending instead to invoke unique moments of personal transformation in the past and visions of divine transcendence in the future.

Indeed, aging very often brings together groups of people who experience time in radically different ways. With important exceptions (such as Itzel and Ricardo, and others similarly "busy" pursuing their visions of successful aging), many older adults experience time as involving a great deal of waiting. By contrast, their younger family members and others with whom they interact, including health care professionals, may experience time as a very scarce resource. In such situations, relations between older adults and others may be characterized by a striking difference in the experience of time, with a great deal of waiting or stillness on the one side, and much hustle and hurry on the other. The stillness or slowness of old age is not necessarily a negative or empty experience of time, however. As Iza Kavedzija argues, the "pauses" that punctuated conversations with her elderly Osakan interlocutors emerged out of their orientation toward the present moment as infused with the past within an "attitude of gratitude" that supported a kind of "quiet hope." Similarly, Susan Orpett Long describes how older adults approaching death in Japan with whom she worked experienced time as narrowing, but at the same time expanding or collapsing, such that the present moment stretched both backward into the past and forward into the afterlife.

If aging thus involves disparate experiences of time and meaning, let us also recall that aging is not unique to the old, but rather happens throughout the life course. In this perspective, the pandemic experiences of older adults isolated in their rooms or apartments might fruitfully be examined alongside those of young adults forced to return from university to live in their parents' homes, or those of parents engaged in a seemingly-impossible struggle to reconcile the time of working from home, with the time of home-schooling young children. Gerontological research into cumulative disadvantage, meanwhile, reminds us that chronological age conceals the embodied effects of inequalities that render the bodies of poor, disadvantaged and racialized people "older" at younger ages – with grave consequences for those infected with COVID-19.

The question of how people experience time when the time remaining is short, presumes that older adults don't have much future left – but this is true only if we assume that the aging individual is disconnected from any larger entity that will continue. In fact, the articles in this collection offer many

examples of how people do experience futurity in old age through a sense of partaking in a larger whole. Wentzell's informants Itzel and Ricardo understand their own life and activities as partaking in and contributing to the historical development of the Mexican nation – and their active participation in medical (and anthropological!) research also reflects this sensibility. For the South African frailcare residents with whom Golomski worked, futurity resides in the framing of the individual's life and death as part of the working out of a divine plan. Older adults interviewed by Elliott and Carpentieri in Scotland, meanwhile, identified futurity with a sense of generativity that linked their own lives to the ongoing lives of younger family members. In Japan, as Iza Kavedzija argues, the practice of happiness and quiet hope express a forward-looking orientation that expands the fullness of the moment, and coexists with gratitude for the past, phenomenologically uniting past, present and future.

Finally, the sudden ubiquity and valorization of masks during the pandemic brings to mind questions about masks, faces, and more generally what Erving Goffman (1959) famously described as “the presentation of self in everyday life” as these pertain to aging. Might we regard age, aging, even dying as a performance? To ask this is not to suggest that these phenomena are not real, but to draw attention to how they may be enacted with a consciousness of observing others and a concern for dramatic structure. Indeed, ideas about the anticipated, expected, or hoped-for effects of older adults' performance of aging and/or dying on other people run throughout these essays, highlighting what we might call the futurity of effects. Thus, for example, we are introduced in these pages to Japanese elders performing gratitude or goodness, Mexican older adults performing happiness, activity, and modernity, Scottish older adults performing a sense of what it means to be a good person in the context of research interviews, and frailcare staff and residents performing the presence of divinity in everyday life.

In closing, let me simply thank these authors for their insightful and thought-provoking contributions, and express my good wishes for their health and safety and that of their interlocutors, as well as you who read this.

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