Respect and Elderly Australians: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Issues around egregious abuse, such as violence and financial abuse have been commanding the attention of most social science researchers studying the maltreatment of older persons since the late 1970s. The more subtle, everyday experiences of disrespect, which arguably is a precursor to more notorious forms of abusive and violent behaviour; or respect which, arguably, can prevent such abuse from occurring, are less researched. This paper investigates the research into respect for elderly people. Theories on ageing are explored as are definitions of respect, disrespect, elderly, ageism and infantilisation. Research from around the globe is briefly investigated in order to gain insight into whether respect for elderly persons is culturally based.

Introduction

This literature review investigates the ordinary lives of people over the age of sixty-five with emphasis on how they are respected or disrespected and possibly maltreated. Therefore, respect and how it is experienced in the everyday lives of individuals is explored. Theories on ageing are critiqued, with particular attention paid to the respect or disrespect afforded to elderly people by these theories.

Definitions of elderly, respect, disrespect, infantilisation and ageism are presented and the ideas they represent are examined in terms of their impact on the respect that elderly people experience in society. There is a brief foray into research from around the globe in order to understand whether respect for elderly people is different in differing cultures.

Theory

Powell and Longino (2001) observe that Gerontological theories often reflect the values of their creators, and that the social norms and “culturally dominant views of what should be the
appropriate way to analyze social phenomena” (Powell and Longino, 2001:201) strongly influence these theories. Theories that focus on the social problem of old age and/or the social problems that older people experience “may have supported the ageism of which many are arguing against” (Powell, 2001:122); for example, Disengagement Theory which was formulated by Cumming and Henry (1961). Disengagement Theory suggests that there is a functional necessity for elderly people to progressively lose social roles and relationships. It posits that death breaks the necessary equilibrium between society and individuals. Therefore death is regarded as socially disruptive unless elderly people have already disengaged from society and relationships before they pass. In this theory “successful” ageing requires reduced activity and a decrease in effective involvement with society (Russell, 1981).

Disengagement Theory therefore, suggests that elderly people are a burden to society and goes on to promote the idea that elderly people need to be ignored and disengaged from relationships, social activity and social events in order to not disrupt the lives of the younger members of society. This theory promotes ageism and prejudice against elderly people. Powell (2001: 120) asserts that Disengagement Theory “underplays the role cultural and economic structures have in creating the intentional consequence of withdrawal”. Furthermore, Powell (2001: 120) argues that the theory engages in “sociological reductionism” by providing one facile definition of old age, and “functional teleology” by limiting the explanation about old age simply to its “effects or death”. The meanings and interpretations that individuals place upon their relationships is underemphasised and undervalued by this theory (Powell, 2001).

Personality Theory denies the necessity for sociologically-oriented explanations of “successful” ageing (Russell, 1981). It takes a life cycle approach and sees adjustment to old age as a result of the individual personality. Ageing is conceptualised as a developmental process, the outcome of which is reflected in individual coping styles (Neugarten, et al., 1968). Personality Theory does not consider a life course approach and it therefore, structures elderly people into a second childhood, with all the concomitant meanings of lack of personhood, inability to make decisions and inability to care for self. This theory, therefore, fails to account for the many fit, able and socially, politically and productively active elderly people in society.
Activity Theory proposed by Havighurst (1963) is the antithesis of Disengagement Theory and other theories that suggest elderly people cannot actively participate in society. This theory assumes that successful old age is one in which the individual is actively engaged in behaviours which compensate for the loss of previously held social roles. This means that elderly people need to have a high degree of social integration and involvement in social networks in order to experience life satisfaction. Integration is an extensively developed research tradition in social psychology and American Gerontology wherein measures of integration are based on frequency of social contacts, that is, participation in social life or, the maintenance of social contacts within an institutionalised framework of social positions or roles which may be either formal or informal (Russell, 1981). Therefore, Activity Theory accounts for fit, able and active elders as well as the frail, ill and vulnerable. However, according to Powell (2001:120) “Activity Theory neglects issues of power, inequality and conflict between age groups.” Furthermore, it is important to note that individuals experience ageing differently according to their health and their positive, or negative, feelings about self and the roles they have within their families and in society.

McArdle and Yeracaris (1981:327) argued that both Disengagement and Activity Theories did not demonstrate the “social factors that affect the relationship between respect for the elderly and socially valued activities”. They suggest that in societies which value youth over age and experience, respect for older people will be influenced by the kinds of socially acceptable activities in which they engage (McArdle and Yeracaris, 1981) but that both Disengagement and Activity Theories fail to pay any heed to the respect that elderly people may or may not receive. They note that Disengagement Theory does not account for the evidence that “disengaged older people tend to be more unhappy, lonelier and sicker and to die sooner than more active people” (McArdle and Yeracaris, 1981: 309).

Townsend (1979, as cited in Bytheway, 1995) has suggested that the study of age is based on a theoretical framework whereby it is conceptualised as a societal structuring dimension, thus elderly people are viewed as a definable societal group. Research using this framework reveals inequalities in income, employment, health, etc., and thereby places elderly people alongside the disabled, women and ethnic minorities, as groups which suffer from deprivation, disrespect and prejudice. Although it is necessary to reveal these inequalities, this theory does not account for the physical aspects of ageing.
Historically, ageing theory was dominated by “physical, psychological and biological dimensions” (Powell and Longino, 2001:200) and the social aspects of gerontology were largely ignored. However, postmodern perspectives on ageing regard age as “fluid with possibilities not constrained by medical discourses of decline” (Powell and Longino, 2001:205) and elderly people are not viewed as being “fixed to roles without resources” (Powell and Longino, 2001:205). Individuals are able to change their ageing identities and hide their ageing bodies in virtual ways as they become “silver surfers” on the internet (Powell and Longino, 2001:205). In addition, due to the use of cosmetics and cosmetic procedures to modify the appearance, elderly people are an important part of the “beauty” market as well as to the medical profession (Powell and Longino, 2001).

The marketization paradigm is an important feature of postmodernist discourse and “older consumers and the silver economy” (Walker, 2009:80) are becoming more important to companies who wish to sell their products to a more affluent group of people who desire to preserve their younger identities and are not economically constrained by bringing up dependent children. Postmodernism has, thereby deconstructed the notion of “the political economy of old age” (Powell, 2001:121) and acknowledged that not all of the elderly population exists in poverty and dependence. Furthermore, services traditionally afforded to “deserving” elderly populations are marketized as consumer products and care packages in postmodern societies (Walker, 2009).

Discourse surrounding ageing bodies “masking” the identity of elderly people suggests a tension between external appearance and the subjective sense of self and personal identity (Powell and Longino, 2001). Elderly people are able to move beyond simply repairing their ageing bodies by constructing a healthy lifestyle (Powell and Longino, 2001). The elderly populations of Western countries are, therefore, able to maintain youthful outlooks and appearances by the use of “diet and exercise techniques” (Powell and Longino, 2001:205). This creation of youthful ageing identities has become important to the postmodern discourse of leisure. Thus:

“Postmodernism then not only opens up possibilities for understanding and theorizing awareness of the body and self-prudence, but also provides creative contextual frameworks for pointing out the positive images and representations of leisure and aging in advanced capitalist societies.” (Powell and Longino, 2001: 205)
What is “Elderly”?  
Society defines old age by categorising elderly people into socially constructed groups. Studies have suggested that categorising age into constructed groups, in this way, gives age groups both ideological meaning in societies and operational use for policy purposes (Bytheway, 1995, Calasanti, 2010, Calasanti and King, 2007). However, age also has a biological meaning and being elderly in a biological sense may differ from the constructed groups. Furthermore, constructed age groups do not account for maturity in young people and immaturity in older people. Being part of a socially constructed age grouping can reflect either positively or negatively on the people in these constructed groups depending on the meaning placed on these groups by society, and may, therefore, result in either respect or disrespect for the people. Wilkinson and Ferraro (in Nelson (Ed.), 2004) propose that the language used to define elderly people influences prejudice and bias against those people. This bias and prejudice may arguably, be experienced as disrespect. However, being defined as “elderly” does not automatically mean being dismissed, marginalised or treated with prejudice and disrespect. The treatment of elderly people depends on how societies view their elderly and also on how individuals perceive elders in those societies.

Social context can determine the definition of “elderly”. In developed nations an elder is identified as someone who has retired and is usually over the age of sixty-five years (Kurture et al., 1992) but some developed nations define a person as being elderly from as young as sixty years of age (Doe et al, 2009). Indigenous women in Australia are classified as elderly from the age of forty-five years due to their lower life expectancy in comparison to the life expectancy of non-indigenous women (McFerran, 2008). Although the lower life expectancy of indigenous people in Australia is an extremely difficult and complex situation which needs to be addressed, to be classified as an elder amongst Australian Aboriginal people provides status and respect that does not apply to elderly people of the non-indigenous Australian population.

Gilleard and Higgs (2005) discuss the concept of a “third age” which occurs after paid employment, when child bearing and rearing have ended, and occurs before people have begun to decline into ill-health and frailty. This third age is regarded as neither old age nor middle age and as such is a newer construct in age groupings. It is suggested that cultural developments occurring in the late twentieth century caused a dislocation of this group of
people from the then current constructions of the life course (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005). However, Rowland (1991:10) was discussing ageing in Australia in terms of ‘young-old’ and ‘old-old’ from research conducted in the 1980s and in 1990. In the USA the elderly population is discussed as the young-old, the old and the oldest-old (http://transgenerational.org/aging/demographics.htm). This differing notion of ‘old’ significantly impacts the definition of elderly people as people over the age of sixty-five. The fourth age, or people who are in decline due to ill-health and frailty, could be regarded as elderly rather than the socially constructed age group of “over sixty-five”. Constructing a definitive age as elderly raises many questions and, therefore, is fraught with difficulties. People in the third age, or the ‘young-old’ sometimes take up charitable work helping “elderly people” (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005). Constructing an age group of ‘elderly people’ may, therefore, be more easily based on physical age rather than social or physical attributes.

The population in Australia is ageing, as is the population in Europe, Great Britain, the USA, Canada, and other countries defined as “Western”. There are four generally accepted reasons for the ageing of the population: declining fertility, baby boomers turning sixty-five years of age from the year 2011, immigration not keeping pace with the ageing population and increased longevity (Walker, 2009). The ageing population means that studying respect for elderly people is now increasingly significant, when it may not have been significant twenty or thirty years ago.

**Definition of Respect for Elders**

Respect for elders as a concept is very general and it is, therefore, hard to generate empirical data and provide clear guidance for practice and research (Sung, et al., 2010) into respect for elderly people. Therefore, there are fewer studies about respect for elders than there are studies about disrespect and egregious forms of maltreatment of elderly people.

Various studies have provided definitions for elder respect centred on paying attention to the person. It has been suggested that respect means taking a person seriously by paying careful attention to that person and having sympathetic consideration of the person’s needs and wants (Sung, et al., 2010, Downie and Telfer, 1970, Dillon, 1992). However, other studies have commented that respect is more than merely paying attention but that it additionally requires actions and behaviours that are deserved by the recipient (Gibbard, 1992). These actions and behaviours are intended to convey a sense of altruistic and benevolent regard for elderly
people (Kunda and Schwartz, 1983). Silverman and Maxwell (1978) propose that elder respect is an open behavioural expression that can be both observed and recorded. Whereas Sennett (2004: 59) states that the “the acts which convey respect – the acts of acknowledging others- are demanding and obscure.” (Emphasis mine)

The following types of respect towards elders have been identified in research: service and care respect (e.g. housekeeping, personal care), victual respect (e.g. serving food and drinks of the elders’ choice), gift respect (providing gifts), linguistic respect (using respectful language), presentational respect (being courteous in appearance), spatial respect (providing elders with honourable seats), celebrative respect (celebrating birthdays), acquiescent respect (complying with elders’ words), consulting respect (seeking advice), salutatory respect (greeting elders), public respect and ancestor respect (worshipping ancestors) (Silverman and Maxwell, 1978, Palmore and Maeda, 1985, Mehta, 1997 as cited in Sung et al, 2010, Ingersoll-Dayton and Saengtienchai, 1999). These studies have found that respect for elders shows similar forms across cultures, but some have failed to include Western cultures in their studies. They have also failed to provide details about interactions between the elder and the younger person providing respectful behaviours, and they have not provided the interpretation or desires that both parties had from the interactions (Sung, et al., 2010).

Different cultures perceive actions and behaviours differently, therefore respect may be regarded as a culturally based concept (Holmes and Holmes, 1995 as cited in Sung, 2004, and Sokolovsky, 1990, as cited in Sung, 2004) and therefore, cultural change has a significant impact on respect for elderly people (Sung, 2004). Perspectives on care and treatment of elderly people are very different between Asian cultures and Western cultures (Holmes and Holmes, 1995, as cited in Sung, 2004, Liu and Kendig, 2000, as cited in Sung 2004). For example, in Australian culture ancestor respect is not a value that Caucasian Australians hold as important, whereas in Oriental cultures which value Confucian ethics, this form of respect is regarded as significant.

Sung (2004) researched the treatment of elderly people and commented that the status of elderly people needs to be raised, particularly in Western societies and cultures (Sung, 2004). Gerontologists hope that respect for elderly persons will lead to elderly people being cared for with propriety and humanity, and that therefore, they will be more fully integrated with both family and society (Sung, 2004). However, this comment fails to take into account the
‘young-old’ or ‘third agers’ who are still active in society, and are often participating in full-time work, for example, Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Stokes.

**Disrespect versus Respect**

Honneth (1990) describes disrespect as the denial of approval or recognition of another person. He notes that negative experiences of disrespect and insult have turned the normative goal of securing human dignity into a driving force in history and furthermore, that various experiences of personal disrespect provide a moral driving force in the process of societal development (Honneth, 1990). Honneth (2007: 71) states very clearly that “The normative core of ... notions of justice is always constituted by expectations of respect for one’s own dignity, honor or integrity.”

Honneth’s (1990) theory of disrespect is derived from the concept of intersubjectivity which proposes that human beings have implicit knowledge that we owe our integrity and self-esteem to the approval and recognition of other persons. Honneth’s (1990) theory states that a positive sense of self is acquired by intersubjective means and, therefore, insult and degradation impair a person’s positive understanding of self. Furthermore, Honneth (1990) states that insult and degradation is injurious to the person and violates the sense of, and belief in, self. Therefore, experiences of disrespect and insult pose a risk of injury which can cause the person’s entire identity to collapse (Honneth, 1990).

Disrespect can also be understood as in the form of physical abuse which takes away the person’s autonomous control over their entire body. This arguably suggests that disrespect is the precursor to abuse. Denying a person’s autonomous control of their own body cripples confidence in oneself and causes a psychological gap which gives rise to negative emotions. Being unable to complete an action leads to negative emotions of moral indignation, offense or contempt, if the action was a social norm and blocked by the other. If the action was not a social norm, and is blocked by the other, this leads to negative emotions of shame, guilt or anger (Honneth, 1990).

The issue of disrespect of elderly people has gained increased attention from social and gerontological researchers since the 1980’s (Sung et al., 2010). Abuse of elderly people is arguably a separate concept from disrespect although disrespect may be regarded as a precursor to abuse (Doe et al., 2009). Abuse against elders was first identified in 1975 by
British gerontologists. At that time it was labelled as “granny battering” (Baker, 1975, Burston 1975).

The focus of the British reports in the 1970s was on elder abuse not on respect of elderly people. This focus led to extensive research into elder abuse in the United States in the late 1970s and 1980s. Several nations including Australia, Canada, China, Norway and Sweden began research into elder abuse in the 1980s and reported this to the United Nations. Although some nations, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, India, Israel, Japan, South Africa and some European countries, lagged behind and did not report such research until the 1990s (WHO/IPNEA 2002).

The United Nations declared 1999 the International Year of the Elderly. It was at this time that issues surrounding the maltreatment of elderly persons were initially broached as a problem of international concern. Unfortunately, respect for elderly people was not viewed as a significant topic and was, therefore, not included in the discussions (WHO/INPEA, 2002). A large portion of the European age research was centred on active ageing and age management (Walker, 2009).

In spite of research and acknowledgement of the issue, elder abuse continues to plague many societies, including our own (Kurrle and Naughtin, 2008, Kurrle, et al., 1997, Sadler, 1992). Issues around egregious abuse, such as violence and financial abuse, predominantly command the attention of social science research about the maltreatment of older persons. The more subtle, everyday experiences of disrespect, which arguably are a precursor to these more notorious forms of abusive and violent behaviour, are less researched (Hockey and James, 1999). To name a seemingly benign example, the notion that the onset of later age constitutes the return to infantile dependence and immaturity, continues to resonate in social imagination and, arguably, in Western discourse (Blatterer, 2007 and Hockey and James, 1999, Powell, 2001, Walker, 2009). Although it has been suggested that such discourse is in place in order to make elderly bodies acceptable, this notion fails to account for the postmodernist discourse on active and participative ageing (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005, Gilleard and Higgs, 2007, Powell and Longino, 2001, Rowland, 1991, Walker, 2009).
Ageism

Ageism is term coined by Butler (1969) and refers to a negative attitude towards older people which leads to disrespect, prejudice, oppression, discrimination, rejection and stereotyping (Biggs, 1993, Palmore, 1999, Wilkinson and Ferraro in Nelson (Ed.), 2004). Ageism may also be expressed as a failure to perceive an elderly person, although they are physically present. “Cultural history offers numerous examples of situations in which the dominant express their social superiority by not perceiving those they dominate” (Honneth and Margalit, 2001:112). Arguably, elderly people may find this invisibility is a common form of experiencing ageist attitudes (Palmore, 2001).

Furthermore, Bytheway (1995) suggests that ageism is an ideology which serves the interests of the dominant groups in societies. Ageism keeps elderly people away from gainful employment, thereby increasing the employment levels of the eighteen to forty year old age groups (Bytheway, 1995). Ageism assumes that the relationships between elders and younger members of society are marked by forms of dependency (Biggs, 1993, Wilkinson and Ferraro in Nelson (Ed.), 2004). However, many elderly people in Australia remain in their own homes in order to keep their independence. Walker (2009) and Biggs (1993) suggest that ageism also excludes elderly people from politics and decisions which affect social policy. However, if an older person has held a prominent political position for many years, he/she may continue to influence social policy after the age of sixty-five. For example, Bob Hawke at the age of seventy-eight (date of birth, 9 December 1929) actively campaigned in the 2007 Federal Election.

Biggs (1993) and Walker (2009) have asserted that older age is a social construction upon which people build stereotypes of older people, and then use those stereotypes to discriminate against and thereby, disrespect, people based on their biological age. However, older age is a biological occurrence as well as a social construction. Ageism, therefore, is a form of discrimination based on biological fact, and interpretation and negative feelings about that fact, as well as interpretation and negative feelings about the social construction (Butler, 1969). Bytheway (1995) defines ageism as a set of beliefs based in biological variations amongst people, and relating in particular, to the ageing process. Furthermore, it has been suggested that ageism is manifested in the actions of corporate bodies and their representatives (Butler, 1969, Bytheway, 1995, Walker, 2009) and that this then results in
views held about ordinary ageing people, who are older than other ordinary ageing people, that are not consistent with views about younger ordinary people (Bytheway, 1995, Walker, 2009). Older age is homogenised and reified by corporations, and thereby, potential for social improvement for older people is discounted (Powell, 2001). However, views about, and respect for ordinary ageing people, and ordinary people generally, are also learned from peers, family attitudes, the media and private institutions.

Biggs (1993) discusses ageism as resulting from actors in the group constructed as ‘normal citizens’ feeling an aversion to characteristics of aged people based on qualities they see in themselves as being unacceptable. Unacceptable qualities attributed to the aged include “weakness or unattractiveness, increased leisure time without the responsibility of raising a family or working life and an assumed lack of productivity” (Biggs, 1993: 84). However, this does not account for elderly people who are actively engaged in work (Walker, 2009), or are caring for partners, grandchildren, parents, siblings or other community members on an unpaid full- or part-time basis. Nor does it account for elderly people who have had various forms of cosmetic surgery or cosmetic procedures (Powell and Longino, 2001, Walker, 2009) to make themselves look younger, or even elderly people who simply look younger due to genetic inheritance (Sontag, 1972).

In spite of the many and varied ways that elderly people do not display weakness, unattractiveness, increased leisure time without responsibility or lack of productivity (Powell and Longino, 2001, Walker, 2009), Biggs (1993) concludes that when engaging in dialogue with people inside the system elderly actors are required to adopt a diminished persona because those actors inside the system will not regard elderly people as “real” people and will, therefore, not regard them with esteem. Biggs (1993) asserts that elderly people are, therefore, marginalised, disrespected, diminished and regarded as unacceptable because communication between elderly actors and ‘normal’ actors causes discomfort between both groups of role-takers. However, in this conclusion Biggs has failed to account for young-old or third age elderly people who do not feel marginalised, diminished or unacceptable.

At the end of the twentieth century ageism formed an important paradigm in Western society and culture, and discourse was centred on the young, fit and able versus the frail and older citizen (Hockey and James, 1993, Palmore, 1999, Powell, 2001, Powell and Longino, 2001, Walker, 2009, Wilkinson and Ferraro in Nelson (Ed.), 2004). However, this discourse failed
to account for the younger old people who are not frail, and are extremely fit and able. It also fails to understand active ageing, the third and fourth ages, and the young old and the older old, or the young-old, the old and the oldest-old (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005, Gilleard and Higgs, 2007, Higgs, Leontowitsch, Stevenson and Jones, 2009, Powell and Longino, 2001, Rowland, 1991, Walker, 2009).

Infantilisation of elderly people
Throughout the twentieth century, Western society, regarded old age “as social problem and this perspective is exemplified through the narratives used by policy makers, mass media, and social gerontologists” (Powell, 2001: 118). Western ideology, therefore, placed great significance on having primarily independent adults wielding social, economic and political power (Blaikie, 1999, Calasanti and King, 2007, Hockey and James, 1993, Powell, 2001). Symbolic childhood and thus, dependence and marginalisation, was an important paradigm which left this power to younger, independent adults (Calasanti and King, 2007, Hockey and James, 1993, Powell, 2001). However, media magnates such as Rupert Murdoch (born 11 March 1931) and Kerry Stokes (born 13 September 1940) wield immense power in Australia and also in Western society generally. Arguably, this could be due to their class and power status, while elderly people from less privileged and powerful backgrounds are automatically retired at the age of sixty-five.

It is important to note that some research into the treatment of elderly persons reproduces, rather than critically examines, the accepted assumption that elderly people are vulnerable and frail, and that they are thus unable to fully participate in society (Hockey and James, 1993; Keyes and Brown, 1992, Palmore, 1999). The main foci of that research are the psychological characteristics of elderly people and their carers. While research of this nature has provided important insights concerning individual dispositions, this has also meant that social and cultural contexts of respect of elderly people remain largely ignored.

Fine (2007, citing Clark and Spafford, 2002) notes that older people who are in need of care are regarded as dependent and are therefore unable to exercise choice and control over their own lives, but that in reality they need the carer to be responsible to them rather than responsible for them. It is suggested that elderly people in need of care are metaphorically regarded as being in their second childhood and therefore have no status as adults, and similarly that younger people with disabilities lose their social status as adults if they become
dependent in any way (Hockey and James, 1993, Wilkinson and Ferraro in Nelson (Ed.), 2004). Therefore, it is dependency rather than age which forms the basis of infantilisation and, arguably, other forms of disrespect for elderly people.

Roberts (1993) wrote that “Financial abuse can be hard to prove as many elderly people do not take full responsibility for their cash or their pension book.” Roberts (1993) was investigating abuse of elderly people, with emphasis placed on financial abuse, and concluded that elderly people were refusing to take responsibility for themselves. This kind of research perpetuates disrespect and ageist attitudes and does not make any progress in dispelling myths about elderly people. Although, research into such egregious abuse of elderly people has brought these situations to the attention of society, there is a need for research which investigates respect, disrespect and ageism and allows elderly people to have their voice without infantilising them.

**Research across the Globe**

Research into the treatment of elderly people shows that disrespect occurs all around the world and in all levels of society, in developing and developed nations alike (Doe, et al., 2009, Dong, et al., 2008, Sung, 2001). Elder abuse is reported in nations where ‘respect for elders’ and ‘familial piety’ is not an important aspect of culture. In Asian cultures, for example China, Taiwan and Korea, where this form of behaviour is traditionally regarded as the way of life, ‘disrespect for elders’ is reported as a problem of growing concern which is leading to abusive situations for elderly people (Doe, et al., 2009). However, various studies (Doe et al., 2009, Dong, et al., 2008, and Sung, 200,) have suggested that Asian lifestyles are changing and that in these cultures people are attempting to change their views about, and forms of, showing ‘respect for elders’ and that elderly people are instrumental in implementing these changes.

Asian studies, report that Asian countries are not as likely to acknowledge disrespect and abuse of elders because of the belief that the Confucian ethic of filial piety prevents disrespect and abuse of elders from occurring (Doe, et al, 2009). For example, an Adult Protective service was started in Korea in 2004 due to abuse of elderly citizens, in spite of the widely held belief that abuse could not be happening. In China, where ‘filial piety’ and respect for elders is a cultural norm, elderly people who do not receive housing and food from relatives are regarded as being neglected and therefore caregiver neglect is commonly
reported as abuse (Dong et al., 2008). Researchers generally report that a break down in the traditional value of respecting elders and in traditional ways of life is contributing to the rise in reports of elder abuse in Asian countries (Doe, et al., 2009, Dong, et al., 2008).

WHO/IPNEA (2002) stated that both South Africa and China have reported a lack of respect for elders as having a significant impact on elder abuse. It is not noted whether this is considered to be a general societal problem or whether it is regarded as a family issue. However, in Kenya disrespect of elders permeates society as a whole and leads to abuse, exploitation and neglect within the Kenyan Health Care system.

Disrespect of elderly people has been reported as a societal problem in a number of countries, for example, Canada, Lebanon, Kenya, Austria and Brazil. It is generally agreed that in these nations social values and attitudes of respecting elderly people have changed dramatically for the worse, especially in younger generations (WHO/IPNEA, 2002). While it is very important to note that disrespect for elderly people is mainly observed in the young this also creates ageist notions against young people and needs to be tempered with research into how other age groups treat elderly people.

Se’ver (2009) comments that Canadian and US populations are ageist and that these cultures marginalise and disrespect their elderly citizens which leads to high incidences of abuse, whereas Asian cultures respect their elders and for this reason lower instances of abuse are reported. However, Sung (2004) and Sung, et al., (2010) state that during research conducted amongst university students in the USA, students interviewed believed it important to show respect for elderly people.

However, Streib (1987) mentions that in the United States children are brought up to think and act independently, to explore and question ideas, to master skills, follow their own predilections and to openly express their ideas, thoughts and opinions. He proposes that it is unreasonable to expect people who have been socialised in this way to suddenly switch priorities fifty years later and put the needs of their parents first (Streib, 1987). Therefore, in Western societies where great value is placed on independent living and adult children live separately from their elderly parents (Sung, 2004) respect for elderly people will take different forms from respect accorded to elders in Asian cultures. It is also important to note that in Western cultures, the elderly parents of people in their fifties may still desire to be
treated as independent people who are able to make their own choices and take responsibility for their own lives.

As aforementioned, the definition of disrespect and abusive situations often changes according to cultural context. Brown (1989) studied relationships in a Navajo Native American Indian tribe. In Navajo culture mutual respect is important and therefore cooperative relationships and mutual helping patterns are regarded as the norm between elders and younger members of the tribe. Elderly Navajo people report neglect in much higher percentages (45.9%) than is usual in Western cultures due to cultural expectations. The researcher regarded 21.6% of the elders as having been financially abused whereas they did not report this abuse themselves because it was regarded as a cultural privilege and duty to share financial resources with their extended families (Brown, 1989). Thereby, suggesting that researchers need to be careful to take the opinions and subjective notions of elderly people into consideration in their research and conclusions.

In India and South Africa elderly widows are driven out of their villages because they are a drain on resources and in the United Republic of Tanzania five hundred elderly women are accused of witchcraft and murdered each year when something unusual or destructive occurs in the village (WHO, 2002). In these societies disrespect of elderly women with no family ties is a cultural norm and therefore, acts of violence against elderly women are not reported as abuse. This is arguably disrespect for women, and discrimination and maltreatment of older women (Leveratt, 2005, McFerran, 2009), rather than disrespect for elderly people and may be gendered in nature and not ageist. However, Powell (2001) suggests that older women suffer from dual forms of disrespect: ageism and sexual discrimination.

Research across the globe, as reported by the World Health Organisation, and other independent studies, concentrates on how elderly people are affected by abuse. Research focussed on respect for, or disrespect and ageist attitudes towards elderly people is limited. Hockey and James (1993) examined how images in the media impacted the views of elderly people in the 1980s and 1990s but research into how the media currently portrays elderly people is limited (Calasanti, Sorensen and King, 2011).
Conclusion
Defining elderly proves to be difficult although various cultures define being elderly from their differing perspectives. Defining respect for elderly people also proves to be problematic and appears to have its roots in culture as well. The definition of the third age, or young-old, and the fourth age, or old-old, is discussed as a significant change in the way elderly people are viewed at the end of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century. Ageism is discussed and it has been asserted by some researchers that ageism is an important paradigm in Western culture and that Western discourse may be ageist in nature.

Western ideology places an inordinate amount of significance on young, independent adults wielding social, economic and political power. Therefore, the popular media associates elderly people with the very young, thus infantilising elderly people and denying them personhood. Western discourse suggests that personhood is based on work and consumption thereby excluding the very young, the disabled and elderly people from having personhood. This may lead to disrespect and abuse of elderly persons. However, it has also been asserted that Western young people may not be as ageist and disrespectful of elderly people as first assumed. Research has found that the quality of life of elderly people is significantly affected by the amount of respect they receive.

Abuse of elderly people has been researched across the globe since the 1970s and although disrespect is arguably the precursor to such egregious maltreatment of elderly persons it has not received as much attention from researchers as has abuse. This literature review has found that elderly people are treated differently according to culture and the beliefs of varying nations. Although, it is significant to note that cultures are changing and that the forms of respect shown to elderly people are also changing due to the influence of elderly people in these cultures.

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