Chapter 6

Discussion Questions.

1. It has been found that the American elderly, who comprise 13 percent of our population, consume more than 35 percent of all our total health expenditures (much covered by government paid insurance: Medicare and Medicaid). The cost of funding Social Security is soaring and expected to be unfunded by 2017. By age, the elderly are the most likely to vote in the United States. Have the elderly “figured out” that their voice must be heard through the voting process? Why haven’t young Americans voiced their concerns about issues they face such as the soaring cost of college tuition? If young Americans voiced their concerns as well as the elderly, would programs such as Medicare and Medicaid be cut due to youth competition for scarce resources? If so, what would that mean for elderly health care?
2. The elderly in many Western nations are marginalized and stigmatized as slow, incompetent, and unable to give back to others and society because of their limitations. Many of the inhabitants of these nations look down on the elderly and exalt youth and being young. The elderly in many Eastern nations look up to the elderly and look to them for guidance and wisdom. Discuss the social, historical, and cultural foundations along with the ramifications of both approaches.
3. According to the Conflict perspective, two groups in society that are at odds with one another are the young versus the old. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Discuss. If you are a young (or older) American, do you believe the elderly (youth) would agree with your position?
4. Thomas (2007) found that older job interviewees whose qualifications were equal to younger candidates were less likely to be hired. While older workers are valued for their work habits, skills, and performance, they are also perceived to be inflexible, unwilling to adapt to technology and are more expensive (due to health insurance costs) when compared to younger workers. Hold a class discussion about the challenges and benefits to hiring young versus older employees.
5. 34 % of workers in the United States have no retirement savings at all. Discuss the issues individuals may face if they have no retirement savings. Ask the students if they are concerned about saving for retirement.
6. Discuss with the class why there are negative stereotypes regarding the elderly in our society. How are these stereotypes formed? Can they be changed?