



So what? Implications for practice

In practice, I think what I have learned about the significance of Elders and how they should be treated has been and will be a strength when I am working with older people. I have been taught to respect Elders, which includes listening to what they think and want for themselves. In my work, I want to honour older people's self-determination, even when their decisions might not be something I think is in their best interest. I must also be careful not to make assumptions about what they want based on my and my family's experiences (i.e., that people want to stay at home as they age). I must really listen to them. I recognize the principle of respecting older people's autonomy may become more ethically complicated when people are cognitively impaired and their decisions could cause harm to themselves. This is an ethical area I would like to critically examine in the near future because I'm not sure what to do in these situations. However, I suspect the ethical approach would be to support the individual with as much self-determination as possible.

Even though I may hold respect for older people, I think I still need to be mindful of my thinking and language in practice. I do not want to speak in a way that blames, pathologizes, or infantilizes older people accidentally. I know that even when I value something, like respecting Elders, that I can unconsciously hold and express harmful dominant ideas and discourses because I am so entrenched in them. For example, in the past I've bought into the dominant neoliberal 'active ageing' idea that it is the individual's responsibility to eat healthy and exercise over their lifetime. Meanwhile, I was not seeing as clearly the social factors, such as gender, ability, class, race, etc., that might be acting as barriers to following the active ageing 'program' (Khungay, 2022). Likewise, I was not recognizing that these aspirations are very rooted in ageism and ableism and do not need to be everyone's goal.

In my practice, I think I also need to keep the structural picture in mind, where I am working to serve community members within an ageist, ableist, sexist, classist, racist, etc. society. I need to be practicing from a critical, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, decolonial, and intersectional perspective, where I must be actively looking for, deconstructing, and challenging oppressive policies and practices that act as barriers and are violent towards marginalized people, including to our Elders.

References

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