WHEN OBAMA BECAME PRESIDENT:

MEANINGS OF AGING IN A TIME OF PARADIGM SHIFTS

Jacquelyn Browne Ph.D., LCSW
Principal Investigator
Yulia Watters Ph.D., LMFT
Co-Principal Investigator
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To utilize a phenomenological qualitative method
- To discover influences of ageism
- To provide a voice for an often marginalized population
- To translate potential findings to better serve this diverse population in Broward County.
METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative Methodology in the Field of Gerontology
  - Innovative approach
  - Focus on human subjects and their stories

- Research Design: Phenomenological Inquiry
  - Delineation of methodology
  - Appropriateness for this study

Moustakas, 1994
DATA COLLECTION

- Sample
  - 10 older adults
  - Ages: 58-86
  - Various economic and ethnic backgrounds

- Procedures
  - Selection of Participants
  - Interviewing Process

- Quality Control
DATA ANALYSIS

- Coding Process:
  - Epoché
  - Bracketing
  - Horizontalization
  - Textual Portrayal
  - Structural Description
  - Synthesis

- Methods of Verification:
  - Member-checking
  - Triangulation
  - Peer review

Patton, 2002
FINDINGS

- Main Theme: Resilience

- Key Themes as Essence of Resilience:
  - A Sense of Purpose
  - Being Independent
  - Having Confidence
  - Continuous Learning
  - Connecting to Family

- Sub-themes:
  - Experiencing Aging
  - Experiencing Health
  - Experiencing Financial Ups and Downs
Resilience and children

- Based on four decades of research with children, to qualify as resilient, individuals must show “positive adaptation and development despite exposure to experiences or conditions associated with negative outcomes”.

Masten et al, 2009
EXAMINING RESILIENCE

- But I think what I’ve learned is that you really don’t know what [you’re] capable of until you’re challenged with situations where you really have to figure out what you[r] strength is and you have to figure out how you’re gonna cope. And so you don’t know, I think, until you’re really challenged. So even though life has been challenging, it’s also provided me with lots of new learning, wisdom, understanding, coping mechanisms, so there are blessings that go with the burdens...(Interview #5).
My major problem is my wife, who has Alzheimer’s, and it’s a difficult situation to deal with...I’ve been married a long time. And, uh, as much of a pain as this can be, uh, I just want to be with her, that’s all, as much as I can, and I have to try to learn (Interview #2).

“But.., I would hope to be lucky enough to see the last one get married.” (Interview #3).

My purpose is to please God and to love and to show others how much God loves us and by me loving them they would know that God loves them too. And this is why my heart is so much into the senior program because of what it does... (Interview #8).

I went from $200,000.00 a year to zero real quick. Started thinking, and I said, “You know what? I want to give back.” I wanted to give back a little bit, but also get into a completely new career. (Interview #7)
THEME: BEING INDEPENDENT

- At this time in my life, I don’t have to do anything I don’t want to do, and I don’t have to be with anybody that I don’t want to be with…(Interview #1).

- Well, you know…[laughs] I guess that I’ve always sort of been a little bit of a …rebel…I decided very early that I…was, actually, gonna be…my own person…(Interview #5).

- I told her I wanted to take my wings and fly a little bit. She didn’t think I meant it. She thought I was just talking, but I wasn’t…(Interview #9).

- I really wanted to get away, to do something better with myself (Interview #10).
THEME: HAVING CONFIDENCE

- I’m still determined that if I’m gonna do something, I’m gonna do it right or I’m not gonna do it at all...It may not have been the best that could be done, but I did it the best way I could, and that pleased me (Interview #2).

- But there’s one thing I’ve never been afraid to gamble on, me (Interview #6).

- – when I first came here...it was different than what I was accustomed to. But I learned to live with it... but I didn’t change me...from who I was... (Interview #8).

- I'd always seen myself as one who [would find a way to make my dreams happen]. (Interview #10).
THEME: CONTINUOUS LEARNING

- I learned that you gotta do what you gotta do. (Interview #1)

- What I didn’t know, I learned. (Interview #2)

- So even though life has been challenging, it’s also provided me with lots of new learning. (Interview #5)

- ...because I learned a lot. I have given a lot. (Interview #10)
THEME: CONNECTING TO FAMILY

- I think that’s the greatest contribution is raising children who grow up to be good people...what more do you want? (Interview #2)

- And I’m very lucky everybody gets along very well together. The five grandchildren, it’s a pleasure just to see them sit, talk, laugh, .... (Interview #3)

- I'm most fortunate. My stepchildren are very kind and very loving and very concerned. (Interview #4)

- I got married again...my wife wanted a child, and that was the best thing I ever did. (Interview #7)
SUB-THEME: EXPERIENCING AGING

- The only thing that I want out of getting old is I want to be able to take care of myself until the end… (Interview #2)

- ... the nice thing about this life stage is that even though it’s very hard because of physical changes, social changes, economic changes, losses...the stabilizing factor is that I don’t have to rebel anymore... I feel comfortable with who I am, (Interview #5)

- I can do things for myself and you know and I can go out and help somebody else. So I look at aging as just a passing phase where ...it’s what you make it to be. (Interview #8)

- ...I think the older you get the more you come to enjoy life. You can appreciate it because you know all your youth days are gone and you can’t do nothing about it so make the best of what you got coming up. (Interview #9)
SUB-THEME: EXPERIENCING HEALTH

- “... I can’t walk. I saw you walked out of your car, and that’s the way I used to walk and I can’t walk that way anymore. I’m so frustrated. (Interview #1)

- What they don’t understand is what happens to you as you get older. And the older you get, the faster you become older... (Interview #2)

- I wanna make sure that I don’t fall. Falling is the worst thing that can happen to ya. (Interview #2)

- My health concerns me...And I've made the decision that as long as I'm independent I will stay in Florida...(Interview #4)
SUB-THEME: EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL UPS & DOWNS

- We were, uh, sending money to our daughter shortly – around the time she got divorced. Now we send more money. (Interview #6)

- It’s restricting me that I need to be a lot more conservative... (Interview #7)

- ... I look at the God who holds the economy in his hands. (Interview #8)

- It’s telling me that it’s bringing some folks back to where they used to be and letting them look at things in a different way because a lot of people have cooked more than what they needed... (Interview #9)
RESILIENCE AND AGING

- Resilience in Light of Ageism

- Definition of the Concept
  - Social science literature
  - Field of positive psychology
  - Resilience as part of a larger existential framework

- Resilience as a critical factor of growing older
RESILIENCE AND AGING (cont.)

“For those working with older people facing unexpected challenges, financial and otherwise, ....approaching older people from a strengths perspective, that is, in a way that builds upon strengths that they do possess, is critical to facilitating their own capacities for resilience”. Rosowsky (2009)
QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

- Does resilience in aging provide an overarching concept that includes more regularly studied concepts like self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence?

- Is resilience a phenomenon that can be studied as an “internal personality resource” in addition to resilience as a response to external life challenges?

- Are we saying that the experience of aging is seen as containing more life challenges than previous life stages?

- Is the quality of resilience developed and strengthened over time as some authors suggest?

Wagnild & Collins (2009), Windle, Markland, & Woods (2008)
RESILIENCE, AGING, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

“…further analyses using psychological resilience will make a unique contribution to the knowledge of how such inner capabilities enable a positive interpretation of older age”.

Blessings and burdens

...you really don’t know what [you’re] capable of until you’re challenged with situations where you really have to figure out what you[r] strength is and you have to figure out how you’re gonna cope...

...there are blessings that go with the burdens.

Thank you
REFERENCES