

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# SOURCE AND ESSENCE OF GRATITUDE: RE-EXAMINING THE INTERGENERATIONAL VIEWS ON RESPECT FOR THE OLDER PERSONS

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## Abstract

The paper looked into dynamics and variances of the manifestation of gratitude towards the older persons utilizing qualitative survey design. A total of 300 study participants, which include the young millennials, mid-lifers and older generation groups, were interviewed. The tool used was a simple interview guide for a freewheeling interview with storytelling style. Three-level classification of qualitative survey analysis was used. The findings revealed how family, work and societal changes have contributed to the changes in the manifestation of gratitude. The changes in the social structure and the demand to cope with these changes have caused the gap between the desire of the older persons to be respected and how the younger generations have shown this to them. Gratitude, which is manifestation of respect, has evolved and is now shown differently across intergenerational groups and seems to be experienced similarly across nations. The younger generations have a different view on respect in comparison with the older generations.

**Keywords:** Gratitude, older persons, culture, intergenerational perspectives, societal changes

## Introduction

The word gratitude is derived from the Latin word *gratia*, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness (depending on the context). In some ways gratitude encompasses all of these meanings. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives. In the process, people usually recognize that the source of that goodness lies at least partially outside themselves. As a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals — whether to other people, nature, or a higher power (Simon, 2018).

People feel and express gratitude in multiple ways. They can apply it to the past (retrieving positive memories and being thankful for elements of childhood or past blessings), the present (not taking good fortune for granted as it comes), and the future (maintaining a hopeful and optimistic attitude). Regardless of the inherent or current level of someone's gratitude, it's a quality that individuals can successfully cultivate further (Simon, 2018).

Underneath the veneer of change wrought by colonization and modernization, Filipinos' moral values have remained intact and continue to influence behavior. Filipinos are more moralistic than foreigners generally believe. The most powerful moral obligation

in Filipino culture is "*utang naloob*" or debt of gratitude. It is the essence of loyalty, commitment, and moral order. *Utang naloob* is a form of reciprocity, i.e., a favor must be repaid adequately and properly to show gratitude. Quantifying the original debt may be difficult, but repayment is expected to supersede the original or else acknowledge that payment is partial and needs further reciprocation. Other moral obligations include *dangal* (honor), *puri* (also honor), *pananagutan* (responsibility, accountability), and *katapatan* (loyalty) (Hays, 2015).

By observation, the young generation and even some of the older generations do not willfully acknowledge good things done to them. It is taken for granted that kind deeds are part of life and are due to everyone. It is likewise observed that it is rarer now to hear the words "please excuse me" and "I am sorry." There is more familiarity in relationships even with older persons. People tend to neglect that special treatment afforded to older persons and treat them similarly with people of the same age. Older persons lived their generation by being acknowledged as "elders" and as such they expect politeness and respect when dealing with them.

The main objective of this paper is to find dynamics and variances of the manifestation of gratitude towards the older persons. This will provide an idea of the problems caused or the level of

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discomfort observed when the older persons do not feel that they have been paid due respect. It further looked into the effect to the society when both the young and old are not grateful enough for the good deeds that they have been provided with. Furthermore, this will provide an idea on the erosion of the moral culture of which is a pride of the Philippines. This study also aims to illuminate how we should interact with older people in the country so that they feel respected and thus enhanced their level of wellbeing.

### Methodology

This study utilized qualitative survey design. The qualitative type of survey does not aim at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at finding out the diversity of some topic of interest within a given population. This type of survey does not count the number of people with the same characteristic (value of variable) but it establishes the meaningful variation (relevant dimensions and values) within that population (Fink, 2003; Jansen, 2010). In this type of qualitative research, both data collection and the research question develop in interaction with data analysis and interpretation. It is only appropriate to study different population groups when examining the dynamics in interaction between different age groups in society. For this particular question, three target groups namely, the seniors, the adults, and the young persons were included as participants. This was done purposively to select a *diversity sample* with the aim to cover all existing relevant varieties of the phenomenon (*saturation*). A total of 300 study participants from different places across the country were included. A qualitative sample should represent the diversity of the phenomenon under study within the target population. This could be achieved by a large random sample. What saturation is depends on the type and degree of diversity that is judged relevant. To be sure that all forms of diversity are covered it would be necessary to include the whole population in the sample. The data collection method is not limited by the study design in itself, nor is the type of data to be collected. This used the familial, freewheeling interview with storytelling style of what they have observed as behavior of the people of today. This was done whenever there were important gatherings and friendly reunions from 2015 to 2017 (Jansen, 2010). The investigator asked the participants consent to an interview noting down significant information from their stories. The biases of the investigators were withheld throughout the interview so as not to affect the results. In an interview survey with open questions, each answer is unique. Here also all the members of the population under study should be included to guarantee full and detailed coverage (Jansen, 2010).

The main tool used was a very simple interview guide on just two points: what is the behavior of people in showing gratitude, and what values are commonly demonstrated by the actions of the young as well as the older generations towards older people. As the older study participants were mostly former high school and college classmates, establishing rapport and getting their

concerned and cooperative consent went very smoothly. This was how data gathering was done: During socialization gatherings, two or three friends would converge in a comfortable place, usually around a table with snacks, and then in a story telling style, discussion on how people behave today with a focus on the values of respect and gratitude went around from one participant to another. At times, the group that started with to three members would expand to five and even seven members. It was always a lively and interesting huddle and causerie of ideas and observations. Among the younger group, the millennials, interviews were done after seminar meetings and this took time because it was more of a one on one manner (Jansen, 2010).

The data gathered from the interviews were noted down by the main investigator and reviewed for similarities and differences. The other investigators looked into the summarized data to ensure there are no biases based on generation the investigators are in. Both the investigators took part in analyzing the data and referred to literatures to arrive at a similar understanding. The three-level classification of qualitative survey analysis was used: unidimensional description, multidimensional description and explanation (Jansen, 2010; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Sandelowski and Barroso, 2003). Unidimensional description entails organizing data into objects, dimensions for each object and categories for each dimension, whereas multidimensional description synthesizes dimensions and/or categories into more abstract concepts and/or typologies. Explanation relates descriptive categories or dimensions to context (social, biographical, socio-historical, political, etc.) (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In a qualitative survey, one may analyze relationships between types (from multidimensional description) and selected contextual conditions with a conditional matrix, as is sometimes done in grounded theory studies (Creswell, 1998). Most often, description and explanation are intertwined in the process of analysis (Jansen, 2010; Creswell, 1998). The analysis was then presented to participants from different generations for verification.

### Findings

A total of three hundred study participants comprised the population, all women. A hundred (100) of them with average age range of 23-28, the mid-lifers, 100 with average age range of 58-64 and the senior group 100, with average age range of 78 -84. One common characteristic is that they were all college degree holders, and all are professionals. All profess the Roman Catholic faith. Some of the participants are married, some are widowed, others remained single and still others are consecrated persons. Many of the millennials are still single.

With the data analysis approach mentioned above, the following key concepts/statements describing the dynamics and variances were found among the seniors and the mid-lifers:

***The Fast-paced Life and Self-Centeredness.*** The two most prominent concepts coming from the seniors and the mid-lifers are

the fast pace of life in modern societies and the self-centeredness of people nowadays. They found that there is a decrease of politeness, as stated:

*"There is a decrease of politeness and tact among people, it seems everything is due them, and when they pass by senior citizens, few say "excuse me" or say "I am sorry"."*

Another one said:

*"Their manners are somehow not so polite anymore because with the problem of congestion in the traffic, they have to rush and run around."*

They also expressed that there seemed to be an insistent need of individuals to do things hastily. An interesting descriptive phrase used by the participants was "epidemic." They used the word to describe how people live their lives in the fast lane. For senior citizens, this is hurting because the respect due to elders is no longer there as in the times of old, as verbalized by one:

*"What counts to them is "self", others are not counted as important. The focus is more on "self", and less concern for others."*

**The Taking Over by Technology.** People have been so hooked with the ease and comfort afforded by technology. It has taken away most of the socialization time and has formed part of the sine-qua-non repertoire of their daily lives. It has made them always seeking for fast solutions and quick fixes to everything. This attitude has caused the disregard to the opinions of the old and of others in solving problems and finds answers through the use of phones and gadgets.

One participant stated: *"Many of the young and even not so young people are so much in a hurry, they are hooked to modern gadgets. Cellphones have become an essential part of their daily life."* This is supported by another statement: *"It's so easy for them to search anything in the internet. They just click their gadgets to find answers. No need to ask their parents anymore."*

**The Breaking of Ties.** Families lack close knit ties because parents are often away from home even if children are still in their tender young age, in a desire to add earnings to their financial resources. This is what one participant verbalized:

*"Because parents want to earn more income for the children's future, they leave the children at a very young age and work overseas. Sometimes both the mother and father, leave the kids."*

*"Some reasons are the personal and family needs that make them beat the time."*, another one stated.

There is less time spent together as a family even on weekends because each one is more attuned to personal agenda. Overseas employment of either father or mother or both have deprived children of the physical presence and nearness of parents as they were growing up. Another one verbalized: *"There is less time for*

*catechesis, less prayer time together and not many are engaged in evangelizing people especially those in the peripheries. In addition, "Values are not given importance, many things are done mechanically without much thought for others."*

In summary, the seniors and the mid-lifers have lost the old way of showing gratitude. Lack of role models both at home, in neighborhood and in the community have weakened good manners and right conduct. Material needs and mundane aspirations have created selfish satisfaction above the others, hence there is a sense of being in a hurry to do much volume of work in so short of time. There is need to earn more. Lack of community involvement breeds distanced relationships with neighbors and community members. Many do not know their neighbors. Both generations ability to show respect has been eroded by the way they lived their lives.

The following key concepts/statements describing the dynamics and variances were found among the Millennials:

**Born at this Time of Change.** In general, the Millennials are not aware that they lack respect and politeness because this is their way of life. This generation viewed their behavior as unique and interesting. They see it as the most fitting for the time they are in. One said:

*"I think they are just used to it. That is how people of their age behave, without realizing it hurts. They live in a time where they can justify actions and insist their human rights when forced to do things they don't like"*

However, it has raised doubts among the older generations who felt disregarded by their belief of their generation's supremacy: *"They act as if we are not anymore part of the world and in this current time. It's as if this time is only for them."*, as one painfully mentioned.

**Craze Over Tech.** Millennials act similarly with older generations in the way they use technology as part of their daily lives. They interact more with their gadgets than with parents and other family members, taking away a big part of socialization, which helps in forming good attitudes towards others. Parents' opinions are often disregarded since there is easy access to a wide range of information online. These were verbalized:

*"Parents who work abroad gave them gadgets to communicate but they got hooked to it. Even when the parents are around, they spend more time with the gadgets than with people at home."*

*"They easily search for advice on social media than from their elders"*

*"It's easier for them to communicate online than face-to-face. They have global relationships with other countries because of their internet connections."*

*"They are always busy playing with their gadgets than playing with siblings and cousins. They don't even talk sometimes despite being seated side-by-side."*

**Oldies as Role Models.** The millennials would always use the justification, “we learned it from them” or “they are doing it, why can't we?” They do not seem to be wrong because this is what is being seen today among people, as verbalized:

*“They think they are doing right things all the time because they see this done by other people, especially those in authority.”*

*“They would just say they saw it done by others, some saw it in the internet or on TV, that is why they did it also.”*

How gratitude has been eroded in the older generation is expected to be similarly manifested by the younger ones.

In summary, the line between who influenced who is quite difficult to distinguish. The millennials are living in a time where manifesting gratitude has changed. The older generations seemed to just cope with the recent scenario they are in, instead of allowing traditional practices to persist. The millennials are just living the life they thought is appropriate for them. Their perception of gratitude and respect is based on the way they see and acquire it from their limited interactions.

## Discussion

The degradation of gratitude, which is a form of showing respect, has been a concern among generations. Researches have been done which speaks similarly as the findings of this study.

Respect for the elderly is built into the social fabric. The emphasis on social relationships (Ho, 1982) and their awareness of hierarchy within these relationships has traditionally resulted in a special deference paid to the aged (Limanonda, 1995). The value of filial piety, which is understood as “respect and care for parents and the aged” has deep roots in culture. This value serves as a standard by which attitudes and behaviors toward the elderly are judged (Sung, 1995).

Elder respect has been practiced for generations (Sung & Kim, 2003). The older people were respected and well-regarded. Many preindustrial societies a social structure where the authority is assumed by the group's oldest members (Little & McGivern, 2012). In the advent of rapid industrialization, this age-old practice has become an issue of major concern for policy makers and gerontologists. Without respect, positive attitudes towards the older person cannot exist, nor can elders be treated with propriety. Studies have found that respect was a key factor in determining an older person's life satisfaction (McCabe, et al, 2010). The elderly who are respected are likely to increase self-esteem and involve themselves in a cooperative effort with caregivers to achieve a desired outcome whereby treatment benefits can be increased. How the young treat elders is, therefore, important not only to the elderly but also to caregivers and to society (Sung & Kim, 2003).

The meaning of respect had changed over time. Respect connoted obedience in the past, but its meaning had now shifted

to courtesy and politeness. While this shift in meaning was generally consistent, it is not possible to generalize this finding (Mehta, 1997). The traditional view of respect for the elderly is based on what they have sacrificed for and provided to the younger generation. This ethic may, however, be changing over time (Ingersoll-Dayton & Saengtienchai, 1997).

Currently, there are numerous ways in which traditional greetings and ritualized physical gestures had altered. Younger people frequently walked by and ignored older people rather than greeting them with the traditional gesture of hands joined in front of the head (Ingersoll-Dayton & Saengtienchai, 1997; Sung, 2004). Others pointed out how few young people bowed in front of elders. Referring to the younger generation's tendency not to bend low in the presence of their elders. In the Philippines, older persons decried the glib way in which younger people now greeted older people without even kissing their hand. Said one older Filipino adult, “Nowadays, kids don't know anything about respect. You'll have to offer your hand for them to kiss. Sometimes, they don't even want to kiss the older person's hands.” Another Filipino distinguished greetings between the young and the old in the city as compared to the country, “In the city, older people are ignored by the young whereas in the country, young people will at least greet older people with a few words, such as 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon.’” (Ingersoll-Dayton & Saengtienchai, 1997).

Change in respect afforded to older persons exists worldwide nearly among all age groups including adolescents. Various studies with explicit reference to youths of various age, sexual orientation, instructive level, financial foundation, information about aging and encounters with older people demonstrated that they had various view of and dispositions toward older people, however such discoveries are not so much definitive (So & Shek, 2011). Based on the results and other similar studies, these observations can be alluded to the impact of changes in family organization and employment. An increased emphasis on the nuclear family had decreased respect for the elderly. Women's employment outside of the home had influenced respect for the elderly. Many associated women's employment with neglect in the teaching of values. Also, changes in the earning power of young people made them less reliant on and therefore less respectful toward their elders (Ingersoll-Dayton & Saengtienchai, 1997).

The educational system can be held responsible for lack of respect paid to the elderly. The educational system was critiqued for its lack of emphasis on teaching morals and family values. In addition, the changes in the broader world, including moving from an agrarian way of life and adopting Western ways, had negatively influenced respect for the elderly (Ingersoll-Dayton & Saengtienchai, 1997). Ageism is now considered to be the most common form of partiality, and the concern is, its prevalence is not acknowledged as well as its impact. Most societies are actually youth-oriented nowadays and don't really respect or care about older people. As the population age rapidly worldwide, it is then important to rightful to address ageism or disrespect against older people, such as it being prevalent and/or increasing in prevalence (University of Alberta, 2019).

Social forces truly play a role in how generations show respect to older persons. This shapes attitudes about aging, and technology including social media presents negative depictions of older adults and the aging process thereby resulting to lack of attention on this important concern of older persons (Brownell, P, 2010).

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The study has pointed out the reasons why values have lessened its hold among the people today. The changes in the social structure and the demand to cope with these changes have caused the gap between the desire of the older persons to be respected and how the younger generations have shown this to them. It is recommended, based on the findings, to look into specific ways of showing gratitude through other research methods. Families should be the focus of health education in terms of affording respect for the older persons. Considerations in the perspectives of respect across generations must be included in the curriculum so as nurses may be sensitive in the provisions of care.

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