

Laramie Age-Friendly Commerce Project Overview and Reflection

Honors Capstone Project

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Abstract

As public facing projects go, the goal of the Laramie Community Commerce Project is to not only gain a sense of what the literature and academics say about age-friendliness, but to also understand the needs of the specific community, Laramie, Wyoming, and its unique requirements when creating an environment that is more age-friendly for all members. The goal of this project is to mold the businesses of downtown Laramie into a more age-friendly space. A series of 3 educational videos with topics ranging from ageism, physiological changes of aging, and general age-friendliness were created with the intent to distribute these programs to local businesses in the community. Viewers are the workers and business owners of Downtown Laramie. In partnership with the local non-profit, Age-Friendly Laramie, these videos will contribute to making our community more inclusive. It is hoped that businesses will be better informed about how to become a more age-friendly establishment.

Introduction Video

The first video created in this series was an introductory video that outlined the goal of the project and also gave information about the context of the project. With the help of Dr. Steinman, my faculty mentor, we created a script and brought the video to life using animation software from the platform, VideoScribe. The video focused on the topic of aging in general: why is it important, why our society is not set up for aging, how our population is aging at an unprecedented rate, and the future ramifications of our aging society. The goal of this first video was to hook my audience and make them sympathetic to my cause. Because my project is specific to Laramie, I drew upon research regarding the specific population of Laramie and its

aging trends. To do this, I referenced a report that Dr. Steinman, just released about the aging demographics of Laramie and the state of Wyoming (Steinman, 2022). I used this report to provide examples about Laramie to support the general consensus of aging trends in this community. In addition to animation software, this video contains images and footage from downtown Laramie to set the scene.

Video 1: Stereotypes About Older Adults

In my original bibliographic and literature review of the project, I wanted to make this video explicitly informational about stereotypes that surround aging and aging bias. As I began to create a video like that, I realized that it made the video seem depersonalized and not specific to the community of Laramie. Laramie is a unique town because it has a large university population, but there are still people of all ages in our community. The population of adults over the age of 45 is also increasing each year in Laramie (Steinman, 2022). To make this video as specific as possible, I chose to utilize more personal interviews with people in the community, live footage, and pictures of uniquely Laramie things, such as the art murals downtown.

The goal of the video was to still educate individuals about stereotypes or implicit bias that they may hold against older adults. To do this, I first interviewed younger adults ranging in age from 21-33 and asked them to define the age at which they would consider an adult to be “older”. Their answers ranged from 40 to 65, the latter being the most popular age. After they defined the age, the participants were asked to state activities that they think older adults in Laramie do. The participants listed activities such as golfing, bingo, walking, water aerobics, and other stereotypical older adult activities. After I interviewed the younger adults, I interviewed

older adults. What I found was that there are a wide range of activities that older adults do in Laramie such as karate, playing in a rock band, weightlifting, pickle ball, and line-dancing. One adult who I spoke with, Bob, was 79 and mentioned that he tries to boulder or rock climb at Vedauwoo once a week when the weather is nice. I included footage of older adults doing these activities listed above within my video. After demonstrating the various activities that older adults do, I had my audience think about why younger adults did not list any of the correct activities. Following this, I shared my personal definition of ageism, and how we likely all hold bias about older adults (Kunkel, 2021).

Video 2: Biological Changes that Accompany Aging

For my video about the physiological changes of aging, I originally thought about doing a video about the normal physiological changes and then another about pathological changes that can occur with aging. As I dove into research on this topic, I realized that the changes that accompany aging are weighed on a spectrum. It is only natural that these physiological changes will occur such as worsening hearing, vision, and loss of balance, but the scale is changing and while some of this is normal, the majority of it can become pathological (Kunkel, 2001). I believe the difference between normal and pathological physiological changes is not as important for my target audience as I once thought. Instead, I focused on a specific group of physiological changes that are most pertinent to an older adult's ability to access a business: their ability to hear, see, and move/balance. It is a common misconception that all older adults are diseased, and the need for accommodations can make a senior seem sicker than they actually are. Sure older adults go through physiological changes, but these natural changes should not be equated to

sickness or disease. This line of thinking only propels ageism. In the video, I gave a brief overview of some of the most common physiological changes with research from the Journey of Adulthood, but I did not focus all my time on making older adults seem sick. Instead, I talked about how these changes are natural and should be embraced (Bjorklund, 2008). Like the previous videos, I also included photos of older adults that I took in Laramie and more video clips of the town's environment in order to make this education specific to the community.

Future of the Project

Throughout the course of my project, I have been working close with Dr. Steinman who heads the non-profit, Age-Friendly Laramie. Having completed my videos, Dr. Steinman will now utilize the help of other Age-Friendly Laramie volunteers to implement these videos within businesses downtown Laramie. In my videos, I mention that it is advantageous for businesses to become more accessible. Not only will it give them an inclusive reputation, but it will also attract older adults in the community who wish to eat or visit a business place that is accessible. Ideally, my mentor and I hope to market this idea of creating an Age-Friendly Business. This summer we want to design and order stickers that say "This Business is Age-Friendly" or something similar. Once a business has had their employees view the educational videos, we will give them a sticker to display proudly. This sticker will let individuals know that the staff and environment of the business is aware of Laramie's aging population and is aware of steps that they can take to make their environment more accessible.