

Critique

Art serves the societal functions of recording, interpreting and predicting. Here, analysis of popular archetypes in Chicano fiction and poetry are used to illustrate cultural values toward the elderly and conflicts of values between generations of Chicanos. This leads to an examination of how Chicano values differ from Anglo-American values toward the elderly. The author demonstrates the problems of acculturation, blending into and enriching another culture while retaining a sense of one's own culture, versus assimilation, abandoning one's own heritage and taking on the values of another culture. In the latter, upward mobility striving by younger Chicanos creates a chasm between generations.

Lewis has presented, through the use of creative literature, a stimulating illustration of the complex conflicts one faces when attempting to blend cultures with deep-rooted value differences, here, the value of the elderly.

The Mexican American culture has been well established in the southwestern United States for 350 years, far longer than the now dominant Anglo American culture which has been established in the region for approximately 125 years. Mexican Americans native to the southwest are, nevertheless, treated as immigrants and are expected to undertake the task of acculturation. Identifying neither with Mexico nor the United States, they are isolated from both.

The Anglo American culture sees the elderly as a burden on society and discriminates against them socially, politically and economically. In contrast, the Mexican American culture innately respects the elderly and recognizes their value and their role in the society. One of the roles of the elderly in any culture is the continuation of the rituals that demonstrate the emotional strengths of the people of that culture. The non-recognition of cultural status positions such as the curandero/curandera by Anglo American health care and legal professionals puts an ultimatum before the Chicano whose choice between cultures may affect future advancement within the society or interfere with a cultural source of strength for that individual. It may also have health effects if the individual makes an inappropriate treatment choice based on cultural pressures rather than health rationale. Further, it may deprive the individual of the attainment of a cultural position which equates age with wisdom and serves as a positive motivating influence.

Lewis utilizes the Chicano classic, *Bless Me Ultima* (1972), by Rudolfo A. Anaya to demonstrate the integrity of the cultural morality by presenting the concept of harmony between mind and body, a concept

which is inherently understood by the curandera. He shows that the curandera performs rituals to allow acceptance of loss in the context of the cultural reality. While the curandera is a powerful healer, healing power does not interfere with destiny. If the curandera is unsuccessful at healing, then it is destiny.

Elderly Chicanos are described by Kergler and Goldstein (1983) as the "repositories of wisdom and values." They proposed a biological theory which states that the elderly perform the function of biologically and culturally preparing the children for the transmission of information. Biologically, they carry low levels of bacteria that allow the children to develop natural immunities against disease. Culturally, the elderly change neurophysiologically, allowing them to better tell stories and transmit cultural information to children. Lewis's literary examples demonstrate the second part of this concept. In the Chicano creative literature, the Chicano elderly, called abuelita/abuelito, the figure of the grandparents, are depicted as "those who embody wisdom, dignity, history and tradition" and are deserving of great respect. They are seen in the stories as role models and sources of information with special communicative skills.

— Ron Striano
California School of
Professional Psychology, Fresno

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Lewis's article presents a creative and exciting approach for understanding the importance elderly people have not only in the family but in the community as well. He blends literary personification, cultural integration, and social science strategies for illustrating Chicano traditions and their relationships to the aging process. Literary works involving curandero/curandera and abuelo/abuela folk traditions depict reverence, honor, power, and prestige as engaging qualities inherited by the elderly. Lewis's analysis of Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima* and Santiago's *Famous All Over Town* illustrate the congruence folk traditions have with the positive aspects of the aging process. By using literature to illustrate how cultural traditions are transmitted, Lewis shows social scientists the importance of creative fiction in rendering accurate, realistic portraits of people.