Driving Miss Daisy

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Many older adults enjoy the ability to drive. It gives them freedom to get out and socialize, to go to the store, and to go to places they enjoy (like church). However, one understands that when a person ages, many problems start to rise, such as biological, psychological, and social changes. When this happens, an older person might have to give up their ability to drive, and this can cause a feeling of lose and heartache.

Driving Miss Daisy – The Story

Miss Daisy Werthan is a widowed, elderly woman living alone in Atlanta, Georgia. She is very wealthy, a retired school teacher, and Jewish. Idella is Miss Daisy’s housemaid. She is especially great with cooking and cleaning. In the movie, Driving Miss Daisy, Daisy takes her car out of the garage to go to the store. When she is backing up, she crashes the car. After this happens, Daisy’s son, Boolie, wants to hire a chauffeur for Miss Daisy. She is not happy about this, and refuses to let her son hire one. However, Boolie hires Hoke, an African American chauffeur who has driven before.

Miss Daisy refuses to let Hoke take her around to the store or on her errands. She feels like she can do it herself. As time goes on, Miss Daisy starts to accept the help from Hoke. Nevertheless, they develop more than just a working relationship, a true friendship. Throughout the movie, Daisy and Hoke help each other out with different tasks. For example, when Miss Daisy was visiting her husband’s grave, she learned that Hoke could not read. So with the simplest of steps, Miss Daisy taught Hoke the basics of reading. To continue their friendship, after Idella dies, Daisy does not hire another maid, but Hoke helps her out with cooking and gardening.
In the movie, prejudices are being touched. Miss Daisy realizes Hoke is part of racial profiling; however, she does not think that she would ever be judged. This changed when her synagogue was bombed. Miss Daisy considered herself to be a liberal woman; so she attended a dinner to see Dr. Martin Luther King speak. She had an extra ticket, but forgot to invite Hoke until the very last minute, and he decided to stay outside. Miss Daisy and Hoke also took a trip to Alabama for a reunion. Hoke was driving, and stopped so the two of them could eat a packed lunch. A few cops pull up, and start questioning Miss Daisy and Hoke, due to racial profiling and Hoke driving a nice car. Miss Daisy tells them to leave him alone, and they depart.

Towards the end of the movie, the bond between Daisy and Hoke grew even stronger. One morning, Hoke finds Miss Daisy very upset because she cannot find her students’ papers. Hoke tries to tell her she does not teach anymore, but she continues to search for them. Hoke calms her down, and she calls him her best friend. This is when Boolie places Miss Daisy in a nursing home. The movie cuts out on Thanksgiving Day in 1973 with Hoke and Miss Daisy reminiscing about the many years they had spent together.

**Aging**

If someone asked Miss Daisy what she thought of aging, she would probably say that it is “Highway Robbery” (Zanuck & Beresford, 1989). Aging is one of the main themes in *Driving Miss Daisy*. The two main characters, Daisy Werthan and Hoke Colburn, are both considered older adults. When the movie starts, Daisy is about 72 years old and Hoke is 56. As the movie progresses through 25 years, it cuts out when Daisy is 97 and Hoke is 81. Biological, Psychological, and Social aspects of aging such as health, prejudices, and death are hidden throughout the movie.
One of the major concepts we learn from *Driving Miss Daisy* is that prejudices between the 1940’s to the 1970’s were still very prevalent. Miss Daisy considers herself a very liberal woman; however, she even discriminates against Hoke when she forgets to invite him to Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech until the very last minute. Hoke decides to stay out in the car. Miss Daisy also makes little remarks throughout by comparing African Americans to children. During the course of the 25 years of the movie, Miss Daisy starts to forget about the different races, and towards the end, she calls Hoke her best friend. Friendship between two people of different races shows that not everyone has a prejudice. This can relate to aging because in the 1940’s, racial prejudices were still very much a part of people’s lives. Being 72 years old, Daisy had no idea what she was doing or saying was wrong.

Health is another theme that is subtly discussed throughout the movie. It starts with Miss Daisy crashing her car. This is the beginning of what one can understand as different aging stereotypes, such as forgetfulness (Hillier & Barrow, 2007). Daisy, over the 25 years of the film, slowly develops dementia. Dementia is general for a decline in mental ability (Hillier & Barrow, 2007). This can include Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of thinking and memory loss. Towards the end of the film, Daisy thinks she is still a school teacher and gets very angry and agitated with Hoke. Many people with dementia revert to something they have a clear memory of doing in the past and have mood swings (Hillier & Barrow, 2007). Daisy searches all over her house for papers from her students, and Hoke has to step in to help calm her down, and get her back on track. After this situation, Boolie, Daisy’s son, places her in a nursing home. Even though one can see her health start to decline, and she is in a wheelchair, she still remembers who Hoke and Boolie are.
Death is the third theme that can be seen throughout the movie. Death is the only certainty in life, and it is the culminating factor of a life (Hillier & Barrow, 2007). This theme is not directly discussed in the movie, but there are many indications of this, starting with the visit to the grave of Daisy’s husband. This is subtly lets us know that death is all around us and that it is unavoidable. The next time death is seen is when Idella passes away. She was Daisy’s house maid for many years, and died in the kitchen breaking beans. The funeral service for Idella was attended by Daisy, Hoke, Boolie, and many of Idella’s family and friends. From a view, it looked like Daisy and Boolie were the only white people in attendance. This shows how open Daisy was, and how much Idella meant to her. After the funeral, nothing is brought up about the death.

Death-denying is a characteristic of the American culture. This is because Americans are raised to fear death, and to not talk about it (Hillier & Barrow, 2007). One can see that Americans do not like to say died, dead, or dying. They use terms like “passed away” or “passed on.” Americans have large funeral services, bodies are embalmed and painted with makeup, and many services are offered such as counseling.

Finally, when it comes to the theme of death, one can imply that death is imminent for Daisy. The decline of Daisy’s health, especially with dementia, shows that she is on the downhill of her life. After she is placed in the nursing home, she is seen using a wheelchair. One can imply that she does not have the ability to be mobile anymore. In the very last scene, Hoke is feeding pie to Daisy in a nursing home, and they both are reminiscing about their time together. According to Erickson’s stages of development, the last stage is Integrity vs. Despair (Hillier & Barrow, 2007). This is the time in life when someone reflects on their life before dying. When Daisy and Hoke are reminiscing about their past, one can imply that it is almost Daisy’s time to die. Both of them are happy, Daisy is content, and has lived a good life.
Theories of Aging

There are direct aging theories that are portrayed through the film. The first theory is activity theory. According to Hillier and Barrow (2007), activity theory states that the more active someone is, whether physical, socially, or mentally. Miss Daisy is always keeping herself busy. She can be seen helping with the cooking, helping to keep the house clean, planting a garden, and teaching Hoke to read. Hoke, even though he is younger than Miss Daisy, he continues to be chauffeur.

Another theory of aging that can be found in the movie is the age stratification theory. This theory groups older adults together by age cohort. Daisy and Hoke could be in the same age stratification because they have had similar stories. Daisy and Hoke both have experience prejudice. Hoke because he is African American, and Daisy because she is Jewish.

Important Lessons

Throughout the movie, some important lessons about aging are opened up. Firstly, aging is different for each individual. One can see that as Daisy got older, her dementia got worse. However, Hoke did not show signs of dementia. Second, there are many stereotypes about aging, such as angry, senile, lots of money, weak, and stubborn. While some people as they age can display these stereotypes, not everyone does. Each person is a unique individual and their social situations that they were in when younger usually follows to older adulthood (Hillier & Barrow, 2007).

Another important lesson that Driving Miss Daisy taught us is that friendship comes in many variances, and it is never to late in life to make a new friend. It was not until Daisy was becoming more forgetful, and needing to go to a nursing home, that she called Hoke her friend. Friendship and support can help to age an individual more successfully and cause them to have a
good end-of-life, rather than a lonely, regrettable one (Hillier & Barrow, 2007). This is important to understand because in the 1940’s to the 1970’s, there was still a lot of racial segregation. So for a white, wealthy, elderly woman to call an African American her best friend means a lot.

Quotes

Boolie tells his mom “The truth is, you just cost the insurance company $2,700. You’re a terrible risk” (Zanuck & Beresford, 1989). This is such a true quote about aging in our society. An older person has one accident, and they want to take that person’s freedoms away. Miss Daisy could have been having a bad day. It’s not good to jump to conclusions before asking what is really happening.

Miss Daisy says “I can’t find my students’ papers. I need to get them back to them” (Zanuck & Beresford, 1989). This quote sums up the idea of dementia and going to a time when a memory is being triggered. Daisy was so used to grading papers, that she forgot she does not teach anymore. As the population around the world ages, there are going to be more people who show signs of dementia. So it is important to understand symptoms and ways to help prevent or prolong getting the disease.

“Did I ever tell you about the first time I ever been outside the state of Georgia?” Hoke said. Daisy responded “No, when was that?” “Oh, a few minutes ago,” he said (Zanuck & Beresford, 1989). This quote does not directly talk about aging; however, it is implied. It is important to understand that no matter what age one is, traveling is good for the mind and body. It allows time for relaxation and getaways. As the population continues to age, one needs to be aware that older adults will be traveling more.

Critic Review and Conclusion
From the beginning of the movie, to the very end, this comedy tugged at my heart and emotions. It is very clear that this movie was well written, and made to discuss important themes in life during the 1940’s to 1970’s. The movie does a good deed when discussing racial segregation to the older adult population. The movie was easy to follow, it can make you laugh and cry at the same time. One can get very attached to the characters because they are very relatable to one’s own life. This movie should be watched by many people, especially people studying gerontology. This movie helps to understand aging concepts and relate them to real-life scenarios.

In conclusion, this movie was an amazing depiction of being an older adult in the 1940’s to 1970’s in America. It discusses everything from prejudices, to death, and health. Daisy shows us different emotions and stereotypes that Americans see in older adults. Anger and stubbornness are some of the major emotions that are discussed in the movie. Losing one’s freedom to do something is also a theme, and makes aging theories come into play. And remember, one is never to old to make new friends, or keep old ones. It is this support system that encourages successful aging and end-of-life situations. “Hoke, you’re my best friend,” Miss Daisy exclaimed (Zanuck & Beresford, 1989).
References
