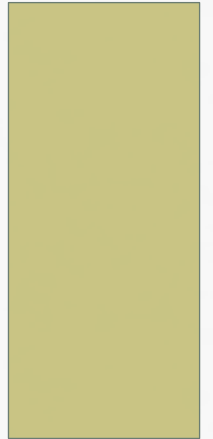


SOCIAL THEORIES OF AGING

CHAPTER 8



THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL THEORIES OF AGING

- **Social Gerontological Theory Before 1961**
 - Role Theory and Activity Theory
- **The First Transformation of Theory**
 - Disengagement Theory
 - Gerotranscendence Theory
 - Continuity Theory
- **Alternative Theoretical Perspectives**
 - Symbolic Interactionism & Subculture of Aging, Labeling Theory, Age Stratification Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Political Economy of Aging, Life Course Perspective, Life Course Social Capital
- **The Second Transformation of Theory**
 - Phenomenology and Constructivism, Critical Theory and Feminist Perspectives



ROLE THEORY

- Based on the belief that roles define us and our self-concept, and shape our behavior



ACTIVITY THEORY

- **Based on the hypothesis that**

- 1. Active older people are more satisfied and better adjusted than those who are not active, and
- 2. An older person's self-concept is validated through participation in roles characteristic of middle age, and older people should therefore replace lost roles with new ones to maintain their place in society



Disengagement Theory

- Based on hypothesis that older people, because of inevitable decline with age, become decreasingly active with the outer world and increasingly preoccupied with their inner lives; disengagement is useful for society because it fosters an orderly transfer of power from older to younger people



GEROTRANSSCENDENCE THEORY

- Parallels disengagement theory
- Places focus on inner self as positive characteristic of old age; represents elders' shift from materialistic rational view to cosmic transcendent one
- Accompanied by increase in life satisfaction
- Values contemplation



CONTINUITY THEORY

- Based on the hypothesis that central personality characteristics become more pronounced with age or are retained through life with little change; people age successfully if they maintain their preferred roles and adaptation techniques throughout life



SYMBOLIC INTERACTION

- A theoretical perspective based on the argument that the interactions of such factors as the environment, individuals, and encounters can significantly affect one's behavior and thoughts, including the aging process



SUBCULTURE OF AGING

- A theoretical perspective based on the belief that people maintain their self-concepts and social identities through their membership in a defined group (subculture)



LABELING THEORY

- A theoretical perspective derived from symbolic interactionism, premised on the belief that people derive their self-concepts from interacting with others in their social milieu; in how others define us and react to us



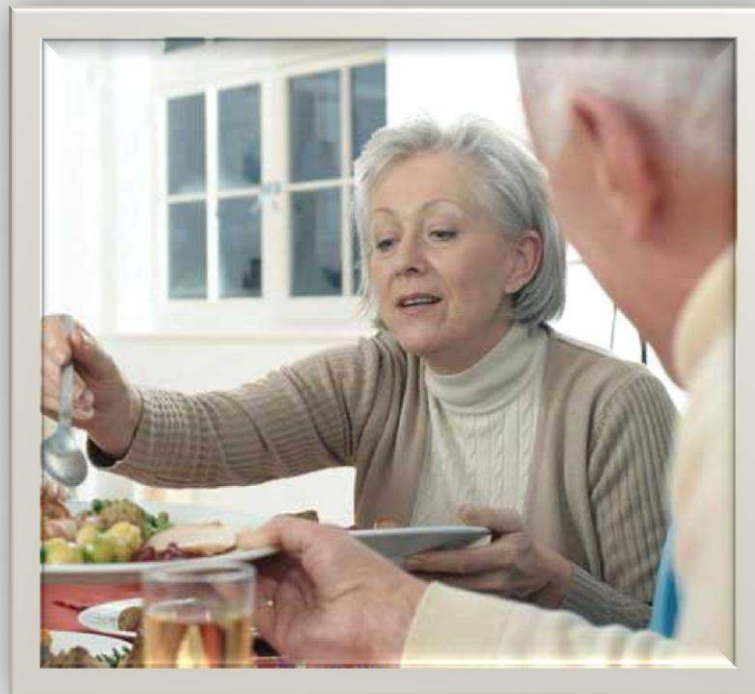
LABELING THEORY

- **Age Stratification Theory**
 - Theoretical perspective based on belief that societal age structure affects roles, self-concept, and life satisfaction
- **Social Exchange Theory**
 - Based on the hypothesis that personal status is defined by the balance between people's contributions to society and the costs of supporting them



POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AGING

- A theory based on the hypothesis that social class determines a person's access to resources; that dominant groups within society try to sustain their own interests by perpetuating class inequalities



LIFE COURSE

- **Life Course Perspective**
 - Multidisciplinary view of human development that focuses on changes with age and life experiences
- **Life Course Capital**
 - Expansion of life course perspective that addresses impact of differential acquisition of resources among different members of a cohort



DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY THEORY: THE 2ND TRANSFORMATION

- **Social Phenomenology/Social Constructionism**
 - A point of view in studying social life that places an emphasis on the assumptions and meanings of experience rather than the “objective” facts, with a focus on understanding rather than explaining



CRITICAL THEORY

- Perspective that genuine knowledge is based on involvement of the “objects” of study in its definition and results in a positive vision of how things might be better rather than an understanding of how things are



FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

- The view that the experiences of women are often ignored in understanding the human condition together with efforts to attend critically to those experiences



POSTMODERN CONSTRUCTIONS OF AGING

- Emphasizes cultural interactions of the complex aging body and social context in shaping “lived experience” across the life course
- Addresses biotechnology and reconstruction of aging bodies to reinvent aging with biomedical/information technology



“FOUCAULT EFFECT” ON GERONTOLOGICAL THEORY

- Centers on medical and social work “expert gaze” that distances themselves from elders and treats them as dependent objects
- Relationship of the controller and the controlled in long term care
- Encourages elders to resist practices of professional power and scientific knowledge to control them

