

Concepts of age and ageing



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“ The ageing process is of course a biological reality which has its own dynamic, largely beyond human control. However, it is also subject to the constructions by which each society makes sense of old age. In the developed world, chronological time plays a paramount role. The age of 60 or 65, roughly equivalent to retirement ages in most developed countries, is said to be the beginning of old age. In many parts of the developing world, chronological time has little or no importance in the meaning of old age. Other socially constructed meanings of age are more significant such as the roles assigned to older people; in some cases it is the loss of roles accompanying physical decline which is significant in defining old age. Thus, in contrast to the chronological milestones which mark life stages in the developed world, old age in many developing countries is seen to begin at the point when active contribution is no longer possible.” (Gorman, 2000).

Age classification varied between countries and over time, reflecting in many instances the social class differences or functional ability related to the workforce, but more often than not was a reflection of the current political and economic situation. Many times the definition is linked to the retirement age, which in some instances, was lower for women than men. This transition in livelihood became the basis for the definition of old age which occurred between the ages of 45 and 55 years for women and between the ages of 55 and 75 years for men. (Thane, 1978).

When elders are replaced with “ the elderly” the world loses veneration. The word elders in Hebrew meant “ beard”. In the Old Testament the elders were head of the households, prominent men of the tribes, and leaders or rulers in the community. The biblical requirements of an elder are described in these

passages 1 Timothy 3: 1-7 states “ If someone aspires to be an elder, he desires an honorable position.” So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach. He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money. He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? An elder must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall. Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil’s trap. Titus 1: 6-9 states “ An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don’t have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. An elder is a manager of God’s household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money. Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.”

Long ago older people meant something, they were cherished and loved and respected. Since they were older they to the people around them were seen to be wiser. Now elders are no longer they are now referred to as the elderly,

individuals who are no longer valuable to society, individuals who have become a burden to people, who no longer contributed to society.

In Erickson (1982) theory Integrity versus Despair, which occurs in the later adulthood in ages 60 years and older, he stated aging as being a state of an individual's development. In this stage the crisis, integrity versus despair, Erikson (1982) suggest that during the beginning of the stage the individual will experience a sense of mortality. This emotion maybe a reaction towards the individual who is going through retirement, the death of a spouse or close friend, or it may be simply a consequence from the constant changing of social roles. Erickson (1982) states this sense of mortality precipitates the final life crisis. In this final life crisis it manifest itself as a review of the individual's life career. This is similar to Butler's (1963) life review, individuals review their life career to determine if it was a success or if it was a failure. During the integrity phase the individual value their whole life as satisfactory and gratification. On the contrary, with despair the result is negative. This negative resolution marked itself as a fear of death a sense that life is too short and depressing.

The roles of the elderly actions their relations and interactions with older individuals. Sociologist uses three different perspective to explain this functionalist, symbolic and interactionism. The first functionalist analyze the ways in which the parts of society work together to keep society running effortlessly. Functionalist found that people with better resources who stay active who stay active in other roles adjust better to old age (Crosnoe and Elder 2002). Within the functional perspective there are three social theories that explains the way in which older people might deal with the later life

experience. The first is the disengagement theory. The disengagement theory states that withdrawing from the society and social relationships is an ordinary part of the growing old phase. Because men focus on work and women focus on marriage and family, when they withdraw they will be unhappy and directionless until they adopt a role to replace their accustomed role that is compatible with the disengaged state (Cummings and Henry 1961).

The second theory under the functional perspective is called the activity theory. According to this theory, activity level and social involvement are key to this process and key to happiness (Havinghurst 1961; Neugarten 1964; Havinghurst, Neugarten and Tobin 1968). In the activity theory it states that the more active and involved the elderly is the happier he/she will be. Reformulations of this theory suggest that particular informal activities, such as hobbies are what most effect later life satisfaction (Lemon, Bengtson, Peterson 1972).

The third is the continuity theory. In this theory the elderly makes certain choices so that they can uphold stability in personality, structure and belief and also the external structuring which includes relationships, active and involvement throughout the elder years. This is an attempt to maintain social equilibrium and stability by making future decisions on the basis of already developed social roles (Atchley 1971, Atchley 1989). The conflict perspective is guided by the opinion that social groups compete with other groups for power and resources, within the conflict perspective there are three theories of aging within this perspective, the first being modernization theory (Cowgill and Holmes) support that the primary cause of the elderly losing power and

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influence in society are the parallel forces of industrialization and modernization.. Modernization is the transformation of a total society from a relatively rural way of life based on animate power, limited technology, relatively undifferentiated institutions, parochial and traditional outlook and values, toward a predominantly urban way of life based on inanimate sources of power, highly developed scientific technology, highly differentiated institutions matched by segmented individual roles, and a cosmopolitan outlook which emphasizes efficiency and progress. (Cowgill 1974: 127). As society modernize the status of the elderly becomes less and they are more likely now to be involved in social rejection.

The second part of the perspective is age stratification theory (Riley; Johnson and Foner 1972). This theory states that the society might be stratified by age, just as there are stratification in terms of race, gender and class. Same age provides a foundation of social control, while different aged groups will have a fluctuating access to social resources for example political and economic power. The final part of this perspective is the exchange theory (Dowd 1975), a rational choice approach suggest that we experience increased dependence as we age and must increasingly submit to the will of us. In relationships most are built on a mutual exchange, as the elderly become less able to exchange resources they will see their social diminish.

The third perspective is social interaction, which focuses on how society is made through the day to day contact of individuals furthermore the way people recognize themselves and others based on cultural symbol. Rose (1962) subculture of aging theory focuses on the community created by the elderly when they are excluded due to their age voluntarily or involuntarily

from participating in other groups. In this theory it proposes that the elderly will disengage from society and develop new pattern of relations with other peers who share mutual backgrounds and interest. Another theory within the symbolic interaction perspective is selective optimization with compensation theory. (Baltes and Baltes 1990) based their theory on the idea that successful personal development throughout the life course and subsequent mastery of the challenges associated with everyday life are based on the components of selection, optimization and compensation. According to this theory, our energy diminishes as we age, and we select (selection) personal goals to get the most (optimize) for the effort we put into activities, in this way making up for (compensation) the loss of a wider range of goals and activities.