

"Hope I die before I get old."

- Pete Townshend, "My Generation", 1965



"Ageism"

Stereotypes, cultural biases and preconceived notions about older people's priorities, health and abilities, can have a big impact on our well-being as we age. Ageism is as important as other prejudices and biases like racism or sexism; it can even shape public policy.

The U.S. is a youth-obsessed culture. We resist and fear aging; we avoid talking about and planning for death as a normal part of the life cycle. Older Americans are assumed to be diminished, disabled, and unattractive. The possibility that we can remain healthy and contribute well into older age is rarely acknowledged. Rather than being venerated for our insight, wisdom, and longevity, we are often forgotten or cast aside. The idea that our later years can be rich and happy is seldom expressed.

Examples: Language matters. Without meaning to do harm, we often use words or identifiers that diminish the worth of our older peers, or make us feel invisible – less than human.

- "She's a feisty old thing!"
- "What a sweet little old lady."
- "That old geezer is still pretty sharp."
- "Bless her heart."
- "Spry", "cantankerous", "dotty", "long in the tooth"
- "Set in his ways"
- "OK Boomer!" (and other generational slurs...)
- "You can't possibly be 70!" (one of my favorites...)
- "Let me do that for you. I'm much faster."
- "I'm having a Senior Moment."

Are any of these better identifiers?

- Elder, elderly
- Senior
- Older adult
- Golden ager
- Retiree

Discussion Questions - Aging and Identity

1. *How has your self-image changed as you've aged?* Has it shifted more around the following:
 - Appearance or attractiveness? Physical abilities? Gender and sexual identity? Authority and relevance? Freedom from work, duty or other expectations? Something else entirely? Are these shifts from within, or imposed by culture and society? Positive or negative?

2. *How do you feel your family and friends view your aging? How have you coped with changes in their view of you?*
3. *How has your role in your community or the larger society shifted as you've aged? Is the shift positive or negative? What, if anything, do you feel liberated from? Do you think there are gendered aspects to the way your aging is perceived?*

Erickson's 8 stages of psychosocial development

As we extend lifespan, the 8th stage, 65 years old and above, becomes more relevant.

Possible emphases in later life:

- Extension of "generativity" stage; making my life count in new ways; possible extension of work years
- "Integrity vs. despair". Reflection, rest, regrets and reconciliation, spiritual resilience
- Extension of time where travel and recreation are possible; enjoyment of nature and humankind.
- Autonomy and independence are still very important.