

## Übersetzung k09e02

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Hello everyone and welcome to the second episode of the chapter on Age and Generations. I am Dr. Adrian Stanciu and I will be talking about diversity of images of old age and their implications.

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I am working at the University of Vechta in the Department of Psychological Gerontology and the main research topics of my work are cultural theories and also age research. I have come up with four learning objectives for this topic: First, by the end of this presentation you will be able to explain the concepts of images of old age and ageism. Second, you will also recognise the diversity of images of old age. Thirdly, you will know the difference between developmental and socio-cultural perspectives on the formation of images of old age. And finally, you will be able to describe how these images can influence a person's health and performance.

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First and foremost, let's deal with the question of "Who is considered old at all?". And that is also a question for you: at what age would you think that someone starts to be old? 50, 70 or even 90? That is exactly the kind of question that some colleagues in Germany and around the world have asked. And the results show that, indeed, there are differences between countries. That means that in Turkey, for example, one is already considered old at 55. In Greece, for example, one is considered old at 67, twelve years later. So in itself this graph shows that the age of a person is socially constructed. Moreover, it also shows that there are differences between countries such as Romania, Germany, but also similarities - I'm sorry, but also differences such as Turkey or Greece. Again, this shows that age itself is socially constructed.

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As an introduction, I have prepared a thought experiment for you, namely according to which characteristics do we categorise other people? For example, if you look at the person on the slide, what are the characteristics that you can recognise?

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Maybe gender, age, religion, but also cultural background. And that just shows that perception takes place by seeing another person. But what is problematic about our topic today is that this perception of a person's characteristics can lead to thoughts and these thoughts, well, the next step of thoughts is of course behaviour and these thoughts are linked to some kind of discrimination.

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So, we are now talking about thoughts as images of old age and about behaviour as age discrimination. And the connection between the two is that images of old age influence age discrimination. And that is the main point of this presentation. And to enable us to go further, let's first deal with the main concepts of today.

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Firstly, what are images of old age in the first place? These images of old age contain ideas, stereotypes or even generalised beliefs regarding the - Attention! - chronological age of a person, but also perceived age. Mostly, images of old age have negative connotations,

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mostly because images of old age in themselves can also be positive and we will see on the next slides exactly what that is and how that is supposed to look.

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As for the second term, ageism, it is a combination of negative emotions or prejudice, in short, and negative behaviour towards older people. And here it is important to make clear that ageism can be both overt and subtle. So that means overt, what we can see with our eyes, but also subtle, which does not seem to have a presence, but it is still there.

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Now let's deal with the question of how we can recognise images of old age in the first place. And at this point I have two theories for you. Let us first look at the Stereotype Content Model. According to this model, images of old age are actually characteristics or adjectives that we associate with an older person. Such as hardworking, efficient, independent, but also honest, warm-hearted and so on and so forth. And according to this model, all these adjectives or these qualities are grouped into two dimensions, one is competence, the other is warmth. And the image of old age looks like this: older people are warm, but fragile or with low performance capacity. And the interesting thing about this image is that it applies almost everywhere in the world, of course with some small differences. But in Germany or China or the USA, this image prevails, meaning this image shows up again and again.

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The second theory deals with the question whether a person's age is perceived the same across life domains or not. And this graph here shows that, in fact, there is a difference between all these areas of life. And the colleagues in Germany and also in the world have shown that there are eight important areas of life that are connected to our perception of older people.

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What exactly do these aspects look like? Let's take two examples. What would you answer to this question, what would you tick on this scale? 'Old people have few friends' or 'old people have many friends'. In case you ticked a 2 here, that would reveal a negative image. I also said that the images of old age are not only negative but can also be viewed positively. In case you have ticked a 7 or 8 here, that means that I see a positive image of old age.

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And now let's deal with the question of how images of old age are created. I have prepared two perspectives for you, two perspectives from the literature which I will present to you. The first perspective is the developmental perspective, and the main argument of this perspective is how these thought patterns develop in us over the course of our lives. And at this point it has already become clear from the literature, shown in the literature, that children learn images of old age in the family by observing and imitating their parents. This means that we are influenced by such aspects in our family contexts.

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Next: children have limited abilities and cannot perceive the differences between people. This means that children generalise unconsciously.

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What is even more interesting about this perspective is that by the age of five, children begin to focus on group affiliation, the so-called 'I' versus 'you'.

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At the age of seven, children begin to express themselves consciously. That means that overall, if they have been shaped by negative images of age in the family and they already perceive these abilities, have these abilities, then already at the age of seven we can talk about images of age - that a person has images of age towards older persons.

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The second perspective is the so-called socio-cultural perspective and at this point, I also want to briefly explain to what extent these two perspectives are different. For the first, the development perspective, the question was time, life trajectory. With this one, the question is: structure in society, socio- or cultural aspects. And the culture of a society plays a very important role in this perspective. And culture, briefly defined, is something latent, normative, so a structure or a system that is actually independent of individuals, but still influences the social structure and how institutions work in a society, so the school system, the family and so on and so forth. I am sure you have heard of individualism and collectivism. But to explain it again briefly: Individualism means that the focus in society is on the individual, whereas in collectivist countries, countries shaped by collectivism, the focus is on the social group, i.e. family, kinship and so on and so forth.

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And here we already see some differences, as far as this socio-cultural perspective is concerned, the more collectivist countries like China or South Korea with such a tradition of taking care of the parents or honouring the elderly, in the more individualistic countries the tendency is to focus more on the younger generations.

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However, what is quite interesting is that according to recent research and new findings images of old age in more collectivist countries are negative. In comparison, the images of old age in more individualistic countries tend to be positive.

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Why do you think that would be the case?

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According to the theory, that's one aspect, the rapid change in society, which means that society in such cultures develops so quickly that tradition cannot follow. The second aspect is related to what we talk about quite a lot in Germany, the age of society, which means that more and more people are living a longer life and thus these differences in the perception of the social group in society develop.

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So that was to briefly show you that two different perspectives are dealing with the same question.

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We have talked about ageism, images of old age. We have seen that it is a matter of

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perception. But we also talked about ageism at the very beginning and now it is time to understand what ageism exactly looks like.

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Again, ageism can have a subtle form, that is, something rather invisible. One definition could be that ageism in its subtle form is something negative, so a negative idea or a negative image hidden as a positive way of dealing with older people. And here I have set up a QR code for you to read more about these aspects. And I have three examples here on how you can recognise these subtle forms of ageism.

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‘Elderspeak’ is a kind of communication with elders, as if the elders were younger people. That means in very easy tones, easy words, as if I were talking to a child.

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Secondly, of course, is assuming responsibility, for example if someone sees such an old person on the street carrying a suitcase and of course this is subtle ageism because the old person is not incapable of doing it on their own. So as I said, the subtle forms are the forms that do not appear directly like ageism, but they are actually harmful to the older people affected by them. The overt forms are obviously something visible, something that is obviously a preference for younger persons over older persons.

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And we already know from conversations, from the media and so on, what happens in the work environment with regard to older people, but also in public transport. In short, overt forms of age discrimination refer to negative treatment of older people.

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And now that we have gotten some clues about images of old age and ageism, what does this mean for us and for older people? Again, I have prepared two theories for you here, to provide an explanation for you. But before that, the message is very clear: images of old age and ageism have a negative impact on the well-being, health, but also performance of older people.

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Again, you can get more information if you scan this QR code.

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How exactly do images of old age affect our well-being and by that I mean us as younger people and not necessarily people who are already in old age. And that is this so-called stereotype embodiment theory.

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There are three different principles. The first is that over the lifespan we internalise images of old age into our self-perception, that is, images of age, positive or negative, prevail in our society and these images are then internalised into our self-perception.

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This means that our self-image can have an impact on how I feel at any given moment. Nevertheless, this theory tells us that these images of age work unconsciously. This means that these aspects will always remain in the back of our minds and as we grow older, they

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increase. They become more and more important, as this illustration shows. So when we pass a certain age limit, we are always confronted with these aspects by society, by friends, by acquaintances and so on.

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60 years old - Deutsche Bahn provides different offers for retired people, for example. And that is already a sign that images of old age are always activated.

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These aspects have a threefold manifestation: psychologically, the hope or well-being of a person, physiologically, blood pressure, heart rate, but also physically. This is just to briefly show that these images of old age have an effect not only mentally, but also physically and directly on the health of an older person.

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For the first perspective, the question was what happens to younger people when younger people have images of old age? And we have already seen that over the life span these internalised images of old age will have a negative impact on our well-being and health in our old age. If we were to deal with the question of what happens to older people, we would have this perspective, namely that the images of age are already there in the back of our minds, that is, we are already influenced and that means that in certain situations such aspects are activated. That means that a situation awakens certain expectations regarding the abilities of older people.

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Secondly, the person affected identifies as old. This means that a situation in itself does not trigger anything. This only happens when the affected person thinks about themselves that "oh, I am actually old".

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At the beginning, we briefly talked about chronological age, but also perceived age, and that is again important here. A person has to identify as old.

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Thirdly, the person affected also has to believe that other people in their environment would describe them as old. And what is interesting about this perspective is that the performance of an old person is threatened by the activation of negative images of old age and that means, for example, dementia symptoms or memory loss, so cognitive performance, physical performance, performance as such is threatened.

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How can negative images of old age be combated after all? And that also applies to ageism. In itself, it is an easy job. Training has a very clear, makes a clear difference. The second aspect would be more contact with older people, that means more exchange with older people, because older people sometimes feel excluded, so there is this boundary between generations. More contact also means less negative perceptions.

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The third aspect is of course the demand for a positive image of old age or the demand for a positive representation of older people in the media. That means that movies, magazines or

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reports, and so on and so forth, should deal a little more with the question of how we portray the image of old age, the elderly.

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To again draw a conclusion: images of old age and age discrimination do not only have an overt effect, but also a subtle one and are mostly negative, are mostly negative, but they can also be positive, and we have already seen that the positive aspects can have a positive effect on well-being, health of an older person. Secondly, the culture of our country can shape us already in childhood through the prevailing images of age. That is, in childhood the first steps in this regard are already taken.

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Thirdly, images of old age are embodied across the lifespan and affect our health in our old age. This means that younger persons who have a negative perception of older persons now, that is, perhaps in their old age, they are also affected by such negative aspects.

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Thus, consequences of images of old age and age discrimination can be reduced in old age through increased awareness, but also with more intensive engagement with old age.

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Here are more references or further literature for you. But the final message is no matter if young or old, we are shaped by negative ageism and images of old age. And it is something which affects our everyday life, that we will deal more and more with this topic.

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At this point I would like to thank you for your attention and say goodbye.