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.
GEROTRANSCEndENCE 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
• 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
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.
• 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